Nintendo 64 ■ PlayStation ■ PC CD-ROM ■ Sega Saturn ■ Arcade ■ Online

26 games reviewed inside

NEXT
GENERATION

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February 1998

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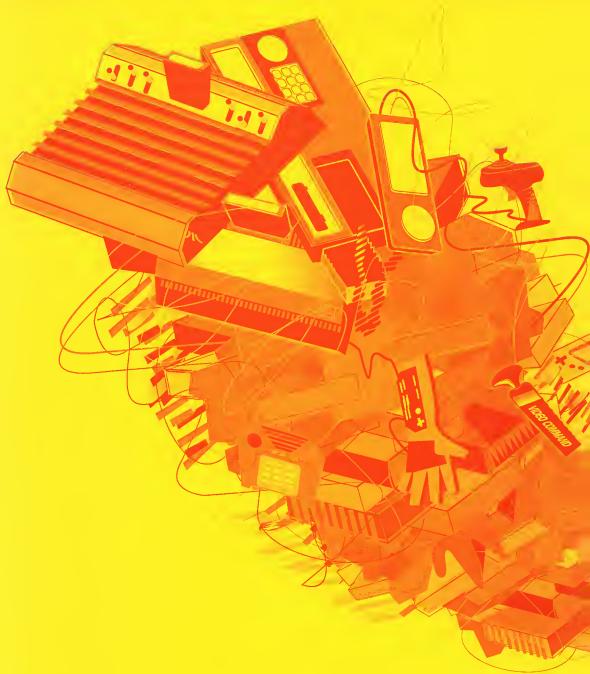# hardcore
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Had enough?

The holidays are over, and the big hits — *Tomb Raider II*, *Quake 2*, *Total Annihilation* — are all solved. Time to put away the consoles and start using the PC for word processing, at least till next November, says the conventional wisdom.

The conventional wisdom is wrong.

The notion that games only sell "real numbers" during the holidays is a holdover from the days when **videogames** were **toys for children.** Sales are significantly higher during the holidays only because the **industry** is totally **holiday-centric,** launching big games — and big **marketing barrages** — at the end of the year. But for **hardcore gamers,** the kind that score well on the challenge starting on page 42, the **game-buying** season is **year round.** For them, all that happens during the holidays is that good games get **lost in the shuffle.** Smart companies already realize this — and have **increased sales** to show for it. Turning gaming into a year-long, **stable business** from a seasonal, **hit-driven** one is essential if companies are to have enough financial security to be able to **take the kinds of risks** the industry's top creative talents think they need to (see "Meeting of the Minds," page 54). And why is this a necessity? To **ensure** the long-term **growth** of the interactive entertainment **medium** and the industry as a whole.

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1. **Out of the Void**
GameFX
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2. **Longbow 2**
Jane's Combat Simulations
Jane's Combat Simulations

3. **Sub Culture**
Ubi Soft Entertainment
Criterion Studios

4. **Half Life**
Sierra
Valve

5. **Croc: The Legend of Gobbos**
Fox Interactive
Argonaut

6. **Interstate 76**
Activision
Activision

7. **Hexen 2**
Activision
Raven Software

8. **Gex**
Crystal Dynamics
Crystal Dynamics

9. **Myth: The Fallen Lords**
Bungie Software
Bungie Software

10. **Moto Racer**
Electronic Arts
Delphine International

11. **CART Precision Racing**
Microsoft Games
Terminal Reality

12. **Slipwreckers!**
Psygnosis
Psygnosis

13. **Forsaken**
Acclaim Entertainment
Probe Entertainment

14. **Taxuras**
America
America

15. **FIFA 98: Road to World Cup**
EA Sports
EA Sports

16. **Flight Unlimited 2**
Eidos Interactive
Looking Glass

17. **Wing Commander Prophecy**
Origin
Origin

18. **Nuclear Strike**
Electronic Arts
Tiburon

19. **G Police**
Psygnosis
Psygnosis

20. **Carmageddon**
Interplay Productions
Sci

21. **BugRiders**
GT Interactive
N-Space

22. **Need for Speed 2 SE**
Electronic Arts
Electronic Arts

23. **MDK**
Playmates Interactive Entertainment
Shiny Entertainment

24. **Power Slide**
Emergent Software
Emergent Software

25. **Skies**
SegaSoft
Paradigm Entertainment

26. **Starfleet Academy**
Interplay Productions
Interplay Productions

27. **Test Drive 4**
Accolade
Pit Bull Syndicate

28. **Unreal**
GT Interactive
Epic MegaGames

29. **iF-22**
Ocean
DID

30. **Deathtrap Dungeon**
Eidos Interactive
Eidos Interactive

31. **Die by the Sword**
Interplay Productions
Treyarch Invention

32. **Terricide**
Eidos Interactive
Simis

33. **Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II**
Lucas Arts
Lucas Arts

34. **Turok**
Acclaim Entertainment
Sculptured Software

35. **Microsoft Baseball 3D**
Microsoft Games
WizBang!

36. **Longbow**
Jane's Combat Simulations
Jane's Combat Simulations

37. **Flying Nightmares II**
Eidos Interactive
Eidos Interactive

38. **Incoming**
Rage
Rage

39. **Jet Moto**
Sony Interactive Studios America
Single Trac

40. **Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny**
Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Westwood Studios

41. **King's Quest II**
Sierra On Line
Sierra On Line

42. **Duske**
GT Interactive
id Software

PC Gaming Comes Of Age.

43. Shadows of the Empire Lucas Arts Lucas Arts	**44. Hellbender** Microsoft Games Terminal Reality	**45. Spycol Ops** Zombie Zombie	**46. Speedboat Attack** Telstar Productions CrVence Studios	**47. UltimHte Race** Microprose Kalisto	**48. Omikron** Eidos Interactive Quantic Dream
49. Outlaws Lucas Arts Lucas Arts	**50. Team Apache** Eidos Interactive Simis	**51. Mad Trax** RayLand RayLand	**52. 10 Six** SegaSoft Post-Linear Entertainment	**53. Uprising** Studio 3DO Cyclone Studios	**54. Montezuma's Return** Random Soft Utopia Technologies
55. Resident Evil Virgin Interactive Entertainment Capcom	**56. Falcon 4.0** Microprose Microprose	**57. Tomb Raider II** Eidos Interactive Core Design	**58. Vigilance** SegaSoft Any Channel	**59. Dark Vengeance** Reality Bites Reality Bites	**60. Pandemonium 2** Crystal Dynamics Crystal Dynamics
61. SHOT Housemarque Games, Inc Housemarque Games, Inc	**62. F1 Racing Simulation** Ubi Soft Entertainment Ubi Soft Entertainment	**63. Prey** GT Interactive 3D Realms	**64. Cyberglodators** Sierra On Line Dynamo	**65. Quake 2** Activision id Software	**66. Steel Legions** Eidos Interactive Digital Anomalies
67. Heavy Gear Activision Activision	**68. Formula 1** Psygnosis Bizarre Creations	**69. Microsoft Flight Simulator 96** Microsoft Games Microsoft Games	**70. Prey** GT Interactive GT Interactive	**71. Manx TT** Sega Entertainment Sega	**72. Redline** Accolade Beyond Games
73. Confirmed Kill Eidos Interactive Eidos Interactive	**74. Extreme Assault** Blue Byte Software Blue Byte Software	**75. NHL 96** EA Sports EA Sports	**76. Grand Slam** Virgin Interactive Entertainment Virgin Interactive Entertainment	**77. Ground Effect** Angel Studios Angel Studios	**78. Swiv** Interplay Productions SCi

3Dfx interactive

NEXT GENERATION

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Are You a Hardcore Gamer?
In what will surely go down in the history of magazines as the ultimate self-examination, **Next Generation** provides more than 200 questions that reveal what every gamer wants to know about themselves but are afraid to openly ask ... "Am I hardcore?"

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Super Stamper Brothers
All things Nintendo aren't born in Japan, as evidenced by the U.K.-based developer responsible for *Donkey Kong Country*, *Blast Corps*, and *GoldenEye*. Rare's co-founding kindred Chris and Tim Stamper break their silence and tell us how they do it

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A Meeting of the Minds
What gets said when top game creators get together to discuss gaming? You might be surprised. We open the forum with Westwood's Brett Sperry, Bullfrog founder Peter Molyneux, Core's Jeremy Smith, DMA's David Jones, Shiny's Dave Perry, and *Elite* creator David Braben
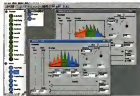
News
On location for Nintendo's Space World Expo • Dural renamed • Personal Area Networks — can your body transmit data? • GT/MicroProse merger canned, GameTek goes under

Alphas: 12 hot games previewed
Everything you want to play but don't know about yet. With the most in-depth stories every month, we reveal what's making what and what they're doing to make them great

Finals: 26 new games reviewed
Lots of those "rushed to make the holidays" games are still lingering on store shelves. Our team of elves sorts those last-minute naughty games from the nice ones

ng **Disc** Contents

650MB feast of gaming insight on a spinning silver platter

Our readers expect nothing less than the deepest and most relevant coverage of the game industry, and the **Next Generation Disc** is an integral part of that coverage. Through in-depth interviews with the people behind the games, video footage of dozens of new games in action, and the latest playable demos, the **Next Generation Disc** endeavors to equip its readers with the insider's knowledge it takes to stay abreast of a rapidly evolving industry.

On **The Disc** this month: a round table discussion with the people behind SegaSoft's *Vigilance* and movies of the most anticipated N64 games of the year from Space World '97. Also, Travis Williams discusses ASC Games' *Sanitarium*, and Psygnosis' Greg Duddle and Nick Koufou talk about *Rascal* and *Newman Haas Racing*, two new titles for PlayStation.

Every month we publish two editions of the magazine — one comes with a disc, the other doesn't. If you would like to subscribe to **Next Generation** with the disc, or upgrade your current subscription, call (800)678-3643. We welcome your feedback at disceditors@next-generation.com.

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See the **Next Generation Disc** when you read an article with this symbol on it

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special
Space World '97, *Rascal, Sanitarium, Newman Haas Racing*

previews
Resident Evil 2, Burning Rangers, AeroGauge, NBA Live '98

talking
SegaSoft's *Vigilance* in exclusive interviews, movies, and screenshots

finals
More than 1,300 **NG** finals in a searchable database

pc
Total Annihilation, Tanarus, Mass Destruction, Sanitarium

mac
Myth

internet
Palace Chat 2.5, Heat, link to **Next Generation Online**

08

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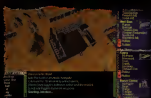
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SQUARESOFT

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

Secretive? Always. Reluctant to talk to the press? Usually. The best console developers in the Western world? Definitely. **Next Generation** talks to Rare's Tim and Chris Stamper, a.k.a. …

Nintendo's
"Super Stamper Bros."

R are is one of the most secretive game companies in the world. It produces great games — not hype. And the company's been doing it since 1981. Following the success of 8-bit home computer hits (like *KnightLore*, *JetPac*, and *Alien 8*) in the early '80s, Tim and Chris Stamper reverse-engineered an NES and became Nintendo's first official Western developer. The company produced more than 90 NES, Game Boy, and Super NES titles ("paying their dues," as the two call it) and are now riding high as the outfit responsible for *Donkey Kong Country* and Nintendo 64 hits *Goldeneye*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Conker's Quest*, and *DK Racing*.

In early 1995, Nintendo purchased a 25% stake in the U.K.-based company, thus ensuring its support for future hardware generations. Recently, **Next Generation** met with Rare's head honchos, Tim Stamper, creative director, and Chris Stamper, technical director, to find out a little more about Nintendo's right-hand men.

Nintendo's favorites ...

NG: Rare's been very secretive over the years. Why is this?

Tim: I guess we're not here for personal publicity — we're here for publicity for the company. Rather than seeing an interview with a picture of somebody, we'd rather promote and push our videogames as far as we can.

Chris: Also, there just aren't enough hours in the day. We've been working ridiculous hours, seven days a week. And I'd much rather focus on the games we're working on than actually promoting ourselves. There's always something to do on the latest games that we're working on. There's always some detail that we need to look at, and when we're happy with one part, we just move on to the next, so it never ends.

NG: Do you think this sobriety and lack of exhibitionism was part of your attraction to Nintendo? It's also a company that keeps its cards very close to its chest ...

Chris: I think Nintendo was very comfortable with us because our objective has always been quality videogames first. That is our number one priority. So I think there's a natural sort of synergy between Rare and Nintendo

NG: Rare and Nintendo certainly seem to share a similar design philosophy ...

Tim: We've been working with them for 12 years, 13 years — a long time. And our target market and audience is the same as theirs. We both want games to do well in Japan and America.

NG: So is there much communication between Rare and Nintendo?

Tim: Yeah, we occasionally go down and visit them.

Chris: But we don't have any input as such into their games. When we visit them, they show us what they're working on, and when they visit us, we show them what we're working on.

They don't get involved with us at all — we decide what games we're going to write and we decide exactly what we're going to do. Nintendo just sort of expects us to produce great games, and that's exactly what we're

here for. We decide at Rare all of the games that we're going to write, and then Nintendo will be the first people that will actually see the game in progress. But the design and the initial decision to go ahead with each game happens here.

NG: So Nintendo and Rare don't work as hand-in-hand as people might expect?

Chris: No. Obviously Nintendo will say, "We'd love this or that type of game" or whatever, and we would certainly listen. But we pretty much decide what it is we want to produce.

NG: Is this type of autonomy strained when Rare works with a Nintendo property such as *Donkey Kong*?

Chris: In the instance of *Donkey Kong* it was, but you have to remember there was nothing available on *Donkey Kong* before we took it on board. There was no *Donkey Kong* game or developed character — it was just this small sprite from this arcade game from way back. When you say "*Donkey Kong*" now you don't imagine the old game, you imagine the new game.

Definitely not PC

NG: Rare must be one of only a few developers in the world not working with the PC. Have you no desire to do so?

Chris: None at all.

NG: Why?

Chris: I'm very, very comfortable working on Nintendo 64. I see the PC as something of a nightmare in terms of trying to produce games for it. For myself, involved with the technical side, Nintendo 64 is a wonderful machine to work on ...

Tim: That doesn't mean to say we don't play PC games because we do.

Chris: [laughs]. That's true. But the thing I like about Nintendo 64, and I don't think many people realize this, is

Nintendo expects us to produce great games, and that's what we're here for

Chris Stamper, technical director

that because it's a cartridge-based machine, although some people see that as a disadvantage, each time you add a larger cartridge to Nintendo 64, you're changing the whole machine itself, and it becomes more powerful. The PlayStation is pretty much fixed in what it is, but as time progresses, Nintendo 64 is becoming a more capable machine.

So I think you're going to see that Nintendo 64 games are going to continue to improve and grow. Not only will we see evolution in the techniques that we use to make games, but because of cartridges getting larger and because you can dynamically download so much information from the cartridge, it's like having a bigger machine with more memory. So Nintendo 64 is a wonderful machine to actually work on, and I think that its future is quite interesting.

talking

NG: But surely the PC continues to evolve also, and a top-end PC with a 3D card is arguably more powerful than Nintendo 64.

Chris: It probably is, but we're much happier producing on a standard format that we know exists and is designed for actually playing games.

NG: PlayStation development and PC development seem to go hand-in-hand, and it's relatively easy to convert a game from one system to the other. Would you agree that it's harder to develop Nintendo 64 games in tandem with the PC?

Chris: I think if you're going to develop a game with your eye on porting it to another platform, I think you're going to make compromises right from the start. And we don't have to do that. We just look at the Nintendo 64 and say, "OK, what's the best possible game that we can produce on that?" with no thoughts of how we might convert it to another platform. And I think this is important.

Also, and this is something we touched on before, we want to be in a position where we can throw enough resources at developing a game, comfortable in the belief that we can get that return back to carry on the process. I don't think we could do that on the PC and I don't think we could do that on the PlayStation — I just think it's too confused a market

NG: As far as the PC is concerned, don't you see much potential for networked, multiplayer gaming?

Tim: I'll handle this one [laughs] I was asked the same question in Japan. I'm not a big fan of network gaming. I think that if you have to go and play a game over the network, it simply shows that the AI in the game is not good enough.

The best network gaming experience is when you get a networked machine connected to people you know, say in a company building where you've got a network and you can play six or eight PCs across the network. Then you can get people fighting in groups and it's good fun — it's really, really good fun.

But why anyone would want to play anybody that they don't even know is completely beyond me. The whole point of playing a network game is that afterwards, if you win, you can go around and make fun of your opponent in person and say, "I kicked your butt!" or whatever — it's just part of the whole social thing. But to play somebody miles away whom you don't know is just such a bizarre concept. I find it very alien.

Chris: For me, multiplayer games are about four people sitting at one screen …

Tim: But you have to know the people you're playing with. It's like in an arcade with a two-, three-, or four-player game. If there are people on the machine you don't know, you don't generally want to join in, especially if they're bigger than you and you beat them.

Breaking the 16-bit mold

NG: Donkey Kong Country was a revolutionary game for the Super NES and single-handedly breathed life into the dying 16-bit generation. Was this game a turning point for Rare?

Chris: It was a step that we worked very hard to achieve. We'd done a lot of "me too" type products on the NES and that gave us the resources. Then, when the market changed, we were able to use these resources to produce Donkey Kong and Killer Instinct and those type of products.

NG: Would you agree that nobody else could have produced Donkey Kong Country at the time it was produced?

Chris: I think that's probably very, very true. I think that you have to have the resources and you have to have the confidence.

Tim: We had a meeting about this list of equipment that was required to write Donkey Kong Country, and it was colossal. And I guess that was a turning point in Rare's life. The safe way would have been to have said, "No, we will not buy that equipment, yet we'll wait until the price comes down," but then somebody else would have gotten hold of it, I'm sure.

It was a big decision, a big decision for Rare. If that had gone wrong, it probably would have broken the company.

NG: So producing *Donkey Kong Country* was a case of getting out the calculator and working out how much rendering was required …

Chris: Yes, we worked out how much the SGI equipment and all of the licenses for the seats would cost. It was a lot of money, a big investment for that type of game.

NG: Presumably the profits more than balanced the books?

Chris: Well yes, I think it's in the *Guinness Book of Records*. It's just a phenomenal seller.

NG: Does all this big-budget investment and success mean that there is no longer room in the videogame industry for small developers starting out? Could a new, small company — perhaps similar to Ultimate, the company that Rare grew from in the 8-bit era — compete with the likes of *Donkey Kong Country*?

Chris: It's a problem for sure. There's no question about it. But what's interesting is that now that we are a publisher, we are being contacted by small developers, and our philosophy has always been, "What does it take to produce a number one best-selling game?" And we know that it's not purely an issue of money or time. So I think there are opportunities for those small developers, but it does need to be with someone who does have the resources to actually make it all happen. The equipment you need, the time you need — it's a big undertaking.

NG: So what would it take, in development terms, to compete with a game like *Conker's Quest*?

Chris: Realistically, a developer needs to look at a two-year window to produce something very, very special. Really, you probably need more than ten people to do that, and if you want to look at what it's going to cost for 15 or 20 people for two years …

Tim: But every game doesn't have to be like a *Conker's Quest*. Items wouldn't take ten people, two years to produce. I think if any of the small development companies have a great idea that they're confident they can pull off if they had the resources, they should contact a bigger software company and see if they can get some sponsorship or some assistance.

Chris: Yeah, I think it's about getting the deal. That's exactly what we did. There are steps that you have to take, and if you think you're going to jump right to the top on the very first game, you'll quickly find out that it's just going to be very difficult to do. There's nothing wrong with moving one step at a time, and that's exactly what Rare did. We paid our dues in terms of producing a lot of conversions in the early days.

Tim: These resources that we now have are the result of Rare having gone through all the stages and processes that other companies have to go through to reach the point that we've managed to reach now. In the past we've had to do conversions, third-party work — jobs we had to take on because the company needed to survive before it could reach a stage where it could produce its own dream products.

NG: You say Rare can now produce its "dream products." You've just expanded to fill a whole new building. Does this mean yet more Nintendo 64 development, or will you broaden your horizons to develop for other formats?

Chris: I expect us to continue producing high-quality Nintendo products, but I also see this new building as giving us resources to develop coin-op games. Also, if we have a group of guys in the company that comes to us and says, "Look, we've got this really great idea and we need a year, we need this equipment, we'd like to go

ahead and do it," then I think that Rare is in the enviable position of being able to say to them, "OK, take a year, and if after that the game looks good, we'll proceed with it."

NG: And what do you see as the ultimate "dream product"?

Tim: I guess the ultimate game would be one that would always manage to change itself and so you would never get bored with it. Like golf, for example, which lots of people get addicted to. Sure, they might change courses and have a different experience each time they play, but it's always the same game. I wonder if one day a videogame would ever reach that sort of status — that would be a game that would be great to write.

Pride and prejudice

NG: Which Rare game holds the fondest memories for you?

Tim: The ones we haven't written yet [laughs].

Chris: Yes, it's the games that we're actually working on now that we find most exciting.

NG: Across the industry as a whole, do you think games are getting better?

Tim: Working in the software industry, it's always great to see other companies producing number one games or games that are really, really good because I think it

The ultimate game would be one that would always manage to change itself

Tim Stamper, creative director

perpetuates the industry. We're all gameplayers at Rare. We love to play other people's great games, and it is disappointing when you go out onto the streets and take your hard-earned money and you buy a game that looks good but you're unhappy with it.

Traditionally, our core audience is probably 12 years old, which is younger than the PlayStation audience, which is around 21 years old. Our audience hasn't got a lot of disposable income and it's very, very important that when they buy a game that the game is good.

NG: How do you feel about making "kids" games aimed for 12-year-olds? Don't you get tired of it?

Tim: Our games are designed so that both experienced and novice players will get a great deal of enjoyment from them. The experienced gameplayer will have the game played as it was intended, on the other hand, a novice player can pick up something like *DK Racing* and can begin to win the balloons and open up more tracks and just have a great time on that.

Also, I think that if you look at successful movies, there aren't many that aren't parental-discretion-recommended rated. Films have to appeal across the board to be very, very successful and similarly, we're here to write a successful game and not target a core or specific audience. There are a lot of games now that are

Chris Stamper

Tim Stamper

dark and depressing, and kids don't want to play them. Maybe all of these companies that are out there are producing these types of games, maybe they're writing games for themselves and not for the audience.

NG: Do you not ever feel like writing a game for yourselves instead?

Chris: I love the "Nintendo style" games, so we are making games for ourselves. For me, *DK Racing* is a game style that will have appeal across the generations, and I think that's great. I don't want to play games that are targeted or skewed for the higher age groups. I want to play something that's fun.

NG: *Goldeneye* is a very adult game, with some very adult content ...

Chris: I thought that *Goldeneye* was great! I wish that somehow we could get that sort of gameplay and skew it to the slightly younger as well because I still think that those people that are interested in gameplay itself would play the game, regardless of whether it looks slightly cuter.

NG: Were you ever worried about Nintendo's reaction to the violence in *Goldeneye*?

Tim: Yes, we were very worried [laughs].

Chris: But you must remember that it is a known quantity. It is understood that Bond is licensed to kill.

Tim: And not licensed to limp [laughs]. I mean, the character wasn't created by us. We were just producing the game around the movie.

NG: When making *Goldeneye*, were you worried about the implications of doing a movie-license game?

Chris: We were concerned about taking on the Bond license, but I do think that because of our reputation, we had a lot more flexibility than any other company would have had

NG: Will there be another Bond game?

Tim: Yes, we are working on another game with the Bond team.

Chris: And at the moment they're working to make some significant improvements to the engine, so I'm sure they'll come up with something very exciting for the future.

PlayStation? No thanks

NG: Obviously, you're big fans of Nintendo. But you can't deny the success of PlayStation. How do you account for Sony's rise from nowhere?

Chris: I think Sony has a wonderful brand name and a very good machine. But at the end of the day, I think that if it's quality that you're looking for, I think that you have to pick the Nintendo 64. And if you're looking for a machine where the quality of the games will continue to improve, the Nintendo 64 is the only candidate.

Tim: Well, with regards to developer support, I think Sony has made it really easy for a smaller developer to jump online with its system and produce a game that is going to be sold. I don't know how many copies these people are selling, but I gather it's not very many units — especially with a company that is not fully funded.

NG: Do you think Nintendo has got it right in terms of the number of titles it has released for Nintendo 64? If you had the choice, would you prefer to do more?

Tim: I'd sooner do fewer titles that were of higher quality. I'd rather see one single, high-quality game rather than ten low-quality games.

NG: What are the dangers of too much low-quality software?

Chris: The danger is quite simple. If there is an overcrowding, there are too many games, and this results in confusion for the gamers and a tendency to reduce the price of games. And with smaller revenues, how are the developers ever going to generate enough resources to actually produce triple-A games? It's never going to happen.

In this respect, I would say that PlayStation is on a downward spiral market and Nintendo 64 is on an upward spiral market.

NG: You see the PlayStation market heading in a downward spiral? That would mean that the majority of software companies are headed for disaster.

If a crash similar to the one at the end of the 16-bit era happened again, couldn't Nintendo and Rare be dragged down with everyone else?

Chris: I think we're all aware that it is a fashion business, and companies have to be ready for the lean times. Rare is prepared for when the market changes, but the PlayStation developers I've spoken to lead a pretty hand-to-mouth existence, and when the market changes, they're going to be in trouble.

Tim: But this is an entertainment industry, and people are getting more and more spare time and they want to be entertained. So the industry isn't going to be here today and gone tomorrow. I've heard people speculate about the possible demise of the game industry for 15 years, but the industry's still here and we're still here producing games.

THE PITCHER WINDS UP AND DELIVERS THE PITCH. IT LANDS SHORT OF THE PLATE AND BOUNCES OFF THE GRASS AND UP TOWARD THE BATTER. THE BATTER TAKES A STRONG SWING AND KNOCKS IT OUT OF THE PARK. IT'S A HOME RUN!

TRUE

or

FALSE

news

All the news that really matters

Nintendo's
Space World 1997

As Nintendo 64 struggles in Japan, the company postpones 64DD and instead promotes *Pocket Monsters*

Whether it's called Shoshinkai or Space World, Nintendo's annual trade show is always a heavily attended event, and '97 was no exception

N intendo's Space World Exposition (formerly known as Shoshinkai), held in Tokyo last November, was cautiously hailed as a success by Western delegates. The unveiling of playable versions of *The Legend of Zelda*, *F-Zero X*, and *Yoshi's Story* were everything that had been hoped for, and *1080° Snowboarding* proved there's innovation beyond Nintendo's established game franchises. On the other hand, the Japanese launch of Nintendo 64DD has been postponed from March until June (with no news of a U.S. release date), and there was no evidence to suggest that third-party

The "best of show" and the main draw were four new N64 titles, including *Zelda*

N64 development is getting any better. Plus, there's no guarantee that *Pocket Monsters* — far and away Nintendo's biggest success of 1997 — will repeat its bizarre success outside of Japan.

None of the products shown for 64DD are directly applicable to the U.S. market — the *Mario Artist* series lets gamers create their own art and 3D models, but it isn't more than anyone with a PC can do. With 64DD limited mostly to productivity apps and a *Pocket Monsters* RPG with no proven market outside Japan, will 64DD become just an interesting footnote to the Nintendo 64 story? Nintendo of America's VP of Marketing George Harrison thinks it's too early to draw conclusions. "Certainly it hasn't been sidelined. It's still in the starting gate. Our strategy has always been that we're not going to let it go until we're absolutely convinced that there's a good market for it." As for switching *Zelda* from disk to cartridge, "it's a move to take the best advantage of a great title," he reasons. "And we want everyone who has N64 hardware to be able to take advantage of it."

But the result is that 64DD's future does not look good. And whether or not it was ever a serious mainstream contender is now open for debate. In hindsight, it would be

easy to dismiss the project as a clever foil for criticism of Nintendo's cartridge-based policy. Certainly the creativity software demonstrated on 64DD failed to excite Western showgoers. And despite the preview of *F-Zero X* add-on disks featuring extra cars, tracks, and "ghost" opponents, there was little to indicate that 64DD will be a must-have purchase.

Jez San of Argonaut (a company that has traditionally worked very closely with Nintendo, notably on *StarFox* and *Wild Trax*) offers one possible explanation for 64DD's delay. "Rumors have been circulating for a while that recently within Nintendo the main priority has been *Pocket Monsters*, even at the expense of N64," he reveals. "I heard they were taking development staff off other games and projects to make sure that *Pocket Monsters* was done on time. Mr. Yamauchi says today confirmed that *Pocket Monsters* is foremost in his mind, and maybe this is why 64DD has been pushed back." Either way, we don't recommend holding your breath: 64DD isn't scheduled for a U.S. release any time soon.

Shigeru Miyamoto's brace of games on display all lived up to expectations. *The Legend of Zelda* was the focal point of the show floor, with a small portion of the game world available for play-

testing. All delegates seemed impressed, with the general consensus being that yes, it's even better than *Super Mario 64. F-Zero X* offers four-player, high-speed futuristic racing. *Yoshi's Story* takes 2D gaming to new heights, with N64's analog controller giving a new twist to the platform-based, run-and-jump gameplay. And *1080° Snowboarding*, a surprise title from a newly formed group within Nintendo's Kyoto-based HQ, offers a subtle blend of high-tech simulation and arcade action (see page 78).

Third-party software, however, mostly continues to suck. With legions of second-rate clones making up the third-party assault in Japan, there seems to be little improvement from last year. San offers an opinion: "Very few third-party developers are actually working with N64," he points out, "and this is partly because development systems are hard to come by and partly because publishers willing to take the risk are hard to come by. So if you can't get a deal to do a game for Nintendo itself, there's little point developing an N64 game because it will be very tough finding anyone else to publish it. Also, N64 isn't exactly an easy machine to develop for because it's cartridge-based, which means you have to spend a lot of time working out how to make the game fit into the cartridge, on top of the time it takes you to figure out how to make a good game."

Is there light at the end of the tunnel? Harrison reckons so and argues that the obstacles to third-party success are diminishing. "We were probably not as good as we could have been at providing them with technical support early on," he explains. "At the time of N64's launch we had our 'dream team' strategy and we really narrowed down the group of people who were given an early look at the machine and were given the early support that they needed. And even some of these people struggled. Even now, as we expand our support to a larger universe of licensees, we've not had all the technical support in place to do that. Besides, some licensees have

Ah, the Japanese trade show: from the obligatory booth girls to the legions of fans

more expertise and resources than others, and it's a challenge for many people to match the time and dollar investment that Nintendo puts into its own titles."

Certainly, recent cuts in N64 cart costs have prompted more third-parties to sign up, but it's too early to see the results of this yet.

Nintendo Chairman

Hiroshi Yamauchi's annual address to the Japanese videogame industry is always a highlight. This year was no exception. "Overseas, Nintendo 64 has been highly regarded. But in Japan, the feedback hasn't been as good as anticipated," he began. "Perhaps some people think it's because there aren't enough games released, or maybe people say it's because there are no role-playing games." He paused, then dropped his bombshell. "In fact, the [Japanese] videogame market is no longer driven mainly by TV-based console games," was his starting diagnosis. "The recent videogame console market is losing momentum, and naturally it's because of too much boring or complicated software that ordinary users can't enjoy playing."

His prescription for how the videogame industry should get out of this fix? Two things: first, learn from the record-breaking success of the Game Boy's *Pocket Monsters*

series; and second, when it comes to releasing console games, it's quality not quantity that counts. U.S. gamers will be forgiven for raising an incredulous eyebrow at Yamauchi's grim view of the videogame market and for asking, "What the hell are *Pocket Monsters*?" But Space World is a show for the Japanese market, and Yamauchi was addressing specific Japanese concerns. In Japan, *Pocket Monsters* on Game Boy is both the best-selling game of 1997 and the best-selling Game Boy cart of all time. It's provided a much-needed boost for Nintendo in an otherwise tough year, although whether it will settle into a long-term stable market or succeed anywhere outside of Japan is doubtful. As for the "quality not quantity" mantra, there's both value in what he says and a need to take this stance, given the continued lack of third-party support for N64.

In all,

an interesting show and further proof that no one makes videogames better than Nintendo. While Yamauchi may look to *Pocket Monsters* to keep him smiling in '98, Western gamers have at least four great new N64 games to look forward to. And maybe even 64DD — but for that, we'll have to wait for E3 in May. **ng**

The show also displayed several N64 add-ons, including one that allowed *Pocket Monstars* for Game Boy to connect to N64

Good-bye Dural,
hello Katana

Details of Sega's next hardware release solidify

The pieces of Sega's next generation system are falling into place rapidly — and fast enough that a late 1998 U.S. launch is by no means out of the question. The final code name for the project is Katana, a Japanese sword, and according to sources close to the project team, the name is so popular that it may stick for the final product.

As previously reported, the machine will be powered by a Hitachi CPU (Hitachi will also build the actual units), with 3D acceleration coming from NEC's PowerVR architecture. NEC will be offering three different next generation PowerVR configurations — one for the PC, one for the arcade, and one for Katana. Sources reveal, however, that porting between the different flavors of PowerVR's next generation chips will be easy, which should ensure a steady flow of ports to the new system. The next generation of PowerVR should be on par with 3Dfx's Voodoo² (**NG 38**) or Sega's Model 3 board, according to sources close to VideoLogic.

Sega is committed to correcting the biggest mistake it made with Saturn — price. "Sega will do whatever it takes to make sure Katana launches at $199," a source tells **Next Generation**. That dedication means that some elements of the system are still in flux, notably RAM.

"Katana will have one of four configurations," says another source close to the project in Japan. "There will be 8MB texture RAM and 2MB audio RAM, but the amount of main system RAM is undecided," as is the fate of the rumored Katana modem. "It will be either 8MB or 16MB, with or without a modem. It all depends on price."

The amount of system RAM is important, since Sega is planning to use a Microsoft Operating System for the unit. The OS, code-named Dragon, is basically Windows CE with a 5.2 version of the DirectX API included. "Dragon takes up a significant amount of the system RAM at 8MB," says another source, predicting that most developers looking for performance will ignore the Microsoft OS in favor of a

smaller, less user-friendly Sega OS that will also work with the system and allow developers to "get extremely close to the metal."

Sega seems to have learned its lesson from Saturn's failure. The Microsoft OS and APIs mean the system will be easy to develop for (and port to), while the NEC connection basically means that any game ready for PowerVR or PowerVR 2 is ready for Katana. Indeed, **Next Generation** is aware of a number of projects currently in development for "PC and "Sega's new system," as well as a handful of Katana-exclusive projects.

If Sega can convince third parties that porting to Katana requires little more than a recompile and a different SKU, it may be able to obtain a significant number of grade AAA launch titles. And if it can get systems on U.S. shelves by this October at $199, it may put Sony and Nintendo in a defensive posture just as their systems begin to look long in the tooth (particularly a problem for PlayStation if Nintendo has 64DD to rely on).

Model 3 level graphics and speed, as shown above in Virtua Fighter 3 and Super GT, are certainly coming to PC from 3Dfx and PowerVR, and the latest details about Sega Katana indicate that they'll be on TVs as well — sooner rather than later. A late 1998 release is now considered likely

Gaming on a live wire

Researchers have developed Personal Area Networks that use the human body to transfer data

IBM researcher Thomas Zimmerman developed the concept behind Personal Area Networks

A s microelectronics enable devices like computers, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), and pocket videogames to get smaller, the need to keep them all connected grows more important. In an effort to link these devices without hard wiring, research scientists at MIT and IBM Research have taken the principles behind the Internet and Local Area Networks (LANs) down to a personal level.

Personal Area Networks (PANs) use the human body as the circuitry that ties these devices together. A PAN transmitter can take the shape of a common object like a watch, eyeglasses, or a simple credit card. This device safely transmits information by creating an electric field, which uses the body as a "wet wire" to conduct the resulting signal. The person wearing the device can also receive information

like an electronic fax and transfer the data to a PDA located elsewhere on the body.

This technology will also allow the user to transmit information from one PAN to another by simple contact with another person. For instance, businesspeople could exchange electronic business cards with a handshake, or a doctor could download an unconscious patient's entire medical history with a touch of a finger. So PANs could change the face of videogames by making network gaming mobile. Arcade titles could become massively multiplayer and offer persistent worlds, with players meeting individual information on their own PAN. This technology points to a future where gamers might not be tied to a single home gaming system, but rather a worldwide network where they may download and upload

personal gaming information from any location.

Further down the line, PAN technology could link cameras, microphones, and data storage devices that act as prosthetic memory devices. Each image and sound that the user experiences could be stored and replayed when needed. Connecting all these objects through a PAN will be a key factor in making this technology both secure and reliable

Personal Area Networks allow data to be transferred through a simple touch

Unhappy holidays

MicroProse and GT merger collapses; GameTek files Chapter 11

N ormally the cash-in season for the game industry, the final months of 1997 were unseasonably hard on several companies, big and small alike.

Most notably, the merger between GT and MicroProse was canceled (many game insiders believe this is a good thing). "Despite the significant but short-term dislocations caused by the abandoned merger plan," said MicroProse CEO Steve Race in a prepared statement, "we remain extremely positive about fiscal 1998 and our outlook as an independent company." Race also

stated the company's five development studios would remain intact.

The aborted merger is said to have been a major factor in MicroProse's poor third-quarter performance, with estimated losses of between $7 million and $10 million. However, the companies have not cut their ties entirely. "Both managements agreed that the time simply is not right for combining the two businesses," said GT President and CEO Ron Chaimowitz. "Nevertheless, there are important areas in which we can work together."

Meanwhile, heavy losses, development delays, and disappointing sales have forced GameTek to reorganize under Chapter 11 law. "We are hopeful that this filing will provide us with the ability to work out suitable arrangements with our creditors while preserving our existing development operations and the value of our intellectual properties," said CFO Robert Underwood. No comment was made regarding the future of *Robotek* for N64, but **Next Generation** speculates that the property may be sold off or completely killed.

Long overdue, *Robotek* for N64 may never see daylight as GameTek has filed Chapter 11

WRONG!

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FOR THE CORRECT ANSWER
GO TO PAGE 52.

VR SPORTS

VR BASEBALL™ 99

In the
Studio

Better news from even better sources

Eidos has inked a deal with Square to bring *Final Fantasy VII* to the PC. Sources indicate the company has had to promise Square huge sales guarantees to solidify the major coup. Scheduled to ship in mid-1998, a Costa Mesa, California-based group has already been working on the port for seven months. Coincidentally, Square's contract with Sony for future console rights runs out in early 1998, making Eidos a front-running candidate for Square's console games should Sony fail to renew the deal.

A **new adage** for the game industry could read, "Classic games never die, they get remade in 3D." Add *Choplifter* to that growing list. Not publicly announced as of press time, the creator of the original, Dan Gorlin, and his development company, Ariok Entertainment, are set to bring the game to the PC with full multiplayer and 3D accelerator support. MicroProse is set to publish the game.

Veteran game producer and co-founder of EA Sports, Don Traeger, has partnered with Dennis Harper, another long-time programmer/designer, to form DT Productions. The company, which officially launched in December, plans to develop select action and sports titles for PlayStation and high-end PCs. With long-standing ties to the development and publishing communities, it comes as no surprise that the company has already begun work with Sony Interactive Studios, Electronic Arts, and 3DFx. Traeger's legacy can be traced back to early EA hits like *Skate* or *Die* and *Jordan vs. Bird: One on One*. Most recently, he was VP of worldwide product development for BMG before the entertainment behemoth pulled the plug on its U.S. division. Harper's recent design credits include *Primal Rage*, and his 17 years with Atari Games yielded the classic *Toobin*, among other coin-op games.

The sequel to *Goldeneye* is already in development. "At the moment we're working to make some significant improvements to the engine," says Rare co-founder Tim Stamper, "so I'm sure we'll come up with something exciting." The game will most likely not be based on the latest James Bond movie because Black Ops is currently developing a title based on *Tomorrow Never Dies* for MGM Interactive. As of the first week of December, Nintendo had sold more than one million units of *Goldeneye*.

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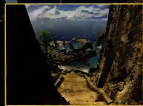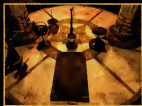
Movers and Shakers

The business news that affects the games you play

Miller's x-ing

You would think that Richard Miller's "revelations" about Project X are worth investigation. The trouble is, the only conclusion such an exercise would reach is the discovery that his words are precisely not worth investigation.

All we are told is that the swankiest hardware manufacturers are apparently tearing each other's livers out to sign VM Labs' creation. The swishiest software publishers are selling their first-borns for a sniff of development kits.

And the technology itself? Well, it's so unlike anything we've ever seen that simply asking for technical specifications shows a feeble inability to grasp the sheer magnitude of this thing. This technology is for the Gods.

Thus far most people will accept Miller's initial boisterousness as the first evidence of what publicists refer to as a press "campaign." That is, small snips of info are being released bit by bit, developing into an awesome crescendo of magnificent hyperbole. Fair enough.

Most of us wish VM Labs well. New gaming platforms — particularly good ones from colorful individuals and outfits — make the world that little bit more exciting, but it's obvious that forming a judgment on Project X on the evidence so far is completely pointless. The only thing we do know is that whatever Project X is, Richard Miller thinks it's swell.

Most uncivilized

In the game Civilization 2, players can use a number of ruses to obtain knowledge from opponents. One of these is to simply ride roughshod over some city or other and take what's inside. The other is to sneakily send in a devious agent, who will steal the information to the tinkering of a deliciously malicious tune.

All of this is depressingly reminiscent of the fight between Activision and MicroProse for the rights to a certain computer game's name.

Heavy artillery takeovers and sharp-minded lawyers have all been utilized. Smaller forces have been manipulated. Territories have been staked out. Thrust

and counterthrust have been flourished. Both these great industry cultures are in a deathly struggle to win the holy war and gain the secret of making lots of money from ... Civilization 2.

Guides dog Nintendo

Meanwhile Nintendo has declared its own "fatwah" on Prima Publishing, which is best known for making game guides. Nintendo has always tolerated the likes of Prima

The company performs a useful service and publicizes Nintendo's games. But now Nintendo alleges Prima has been ripping off the guides its own official magazines and web sites have created.

Prima scoffs at this allegation, stating that Nintendo is just sore because its own cutesy guides are not as popular as Prima's more street-credible offerings.

This could be one of the most complex copyright arguments in years. Of course, the screenshots are Nintendo's, but since it hasn't enforced their protection for years, this is a difficult tact to take.

So it must prove that the jigsaw Prima has pieced together of its games is somehow a rip-off of the jigsaw completed by Nintendo itself. The trouble with completed jigsaw puzzles is that those from the same box tend to look quite a bit alike.

Yamauchi corner

Hiroshi Yamauchi says today's games are boring and overly complex. Whether you agree or not, he is — let's face it — the perfect man to talk about what games of the future should be like. After all, the future is precisely the place where virtually every Nintendo game of note seems to exist.

Lowest of the low

Which species in the game industry can claim the title "lowest of the low"? Some might meanly point to game testers. They are paid the least and treated the worst. But these modern day chimney sweeps perform a vital service, and many go on to

greater things. No, there are far less pleasant creatures.

Judging by a debate in **Next Generation Online's** letters page recently, you might think "marketeers" are the true vermin of the game industry. It is they who twist and turn perfectly valid creations to suit their own warped theories of what the public will buy. It is they who categorize us all into ugly little indices. Plus, they fail so easily into ridiculous clichés of modern habits, lampooned effectively by those "Dilbert" cartoons.

But a flip through this magazine will reveal that, as odious as many of these people are, they do know how to make good ads. And their ability to project great products (like Tomb Raider II, PlayStation, etc.) onto a wider screen is an admirable skill.

No, the real amoebae of this industry are game journalists. They create nothing but their own opinions. They suck off the freebies bestowed upon them by the very people from whom they are supposed to be impervious to. They sit around on their butts for hours on end, getting paid to eat pizza and play games. These people define scum.

But among these there really is the slime of the industry. Game reviewers are OK. At least they create game scores, which are a useful guide. News writers, previewers, managing editors — despite most definitely being pond life, all have their uses. No, when all's said and done, the most degenerate filth of this industry are monthly magazine columnists. It's time these completely unnecessary germs were eradicated once and for all.

I'm fired, aren't I ...

by Colin Campbell

Colin Campbell is **Next Generation's** International Correspondent

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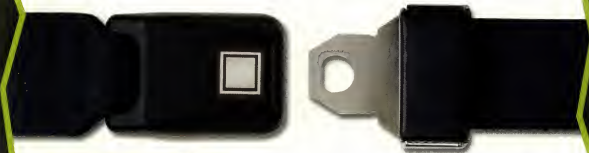
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Joyriding

Gaming on the Internet

Ready or not ...

How many times have you purchased a game only to find that it's not as good as you had hoped? It's plagued with bugs. It's not balanced properly. It's simply not up to the quality standard that you expected when you made your purchase. So what are your alternatives? Return it to the retailer (for those operations with such lenient policies)? Or suck it up and hope for a patch? Neither alternative is really a satisfactory solution, given that what you really want is the game that was promised.

In the past, the occasional patch fixed minor bugs and occasional balance problems (or in the case of *Battlecruiser 3000*, broke as many elements as it fixed). With the advent of online-only games, the possibility for continuous play-balancing and patching is now possible, but should a game ship in a form with hundreds of bugs that directly affect gameplay with the developer intending to fix them over time? *Ultima Online* has been the topic of exactly this debate for the past several months, and while Origin has fixed the vast majority of bugs and performance problems, there is little doubt that when the game shipped, it really wasn't "ready."

So pervasive was this feeling among some players that an entire online protest occurred within the scope of the game. Originally organized by a single individual, hundreds of players came together to voice their discontent with *Ultima Online* on each of the servers that make up the game. Protesters created a new character, stripped to the buff, and proceeded to buy as much alcohol as they could with their starting money. They then marched on Lord British's castle where they usually met gates that barred their entrance (the protest was well organized and naturally Origin was aware of how and when it would happen). Players continued to snoop and steal from one another in an attempt to monopolize the guards' attention. At the same time, constant "screaming" for attention from GMs at Origin resulted in few direct dialogues with anyone.

On one of the servers, Lord Blackthorn (the main antagonist in the game) showed up on the parapets of the castle, proclaimed that "Chaos rules," and opened the gates, allowing the disgruntled gamers to enter. Those that made it through the gates charged Lord British's throne room, but not surprisingly, he wasn't there. The protest continued there until server load prompted many of the gamers to lose their connections, which sort of ended the event on that particular server. Other servers had similar load problems.

The official line from Origin regarding the protest was that it was strangely pleased with the fact that the event was handled within the *Ultima Online* world. "This is just a quick note regarding the protest ... First off, let me say, 'Go right ahead!' We're not going to curtail anyone's right to express their opinion," said *Ultima Online*'s lead designer. "For that matter, I think it is rather cool that a protest like this is being done in-game. The fact that it took place there instead of outside the game shows, I think, that people do in fact treat *Ultima Online* as a world and a society of its own, and I regard that as a real accomplishment on the part of the players."

All in all, the protest was something of an amazing social phenomenon, marking what was the first ever realtime online protest (although exactly what the protest was specifically about, other than general discontent, is still unclear).

While the protest was something of a failure (in that no one received any direct feedback from it), Origin has kept its promises by constantly updating and fixing *Ultima Online*. Since it's shipped, there have been more than a dozen patches made (automatically) that have fixed glaring bugs, including notoriety problems

by **Christian Svensson**

Christian Svensson is the editor of *Next Generation Online*

and extremely delicate elements like the amount of additional damage lightning spells cause when cast upon players wearing metal armor. In addition, Origin has added servers in new locations and even has begun using new ISPs in an effort to provide better performance, which was one of the major gripes from most players and reviewers.

Another major gripe leveled at Origin was that there simply weren't enough monsters to keep players busy. As a result, players resorted to killing one another for pleasure and profit, greatly lessening the fun for many gamers. In addition to increasing the frequency and number of creature spawns, Origin is also providing new content in the form of new items, monsters, quests, and challenges for players. As an example, hordes of demons, drakes, and elementals have been pouring forth from some of the dungeons all at once to attack Britannia. Strike forces have been formed in a number of different cities to repel the attacks when they happen, resulting in a clash of human and nonhuman armies. Even massively powerful GM-controlled Shadowlords are said to have been added into the game (although reports about their abilities are still sketchy).

But given the success of the game (more than 80,000 copies sold through the end of October with expectations of selling double that by the end of the holiday season) and the fact that each month, theoretically, Origin should be pulling at least a million dollars in revenue (since the service has a $10 a month charge), much of that money could be poured back into the game. At the same time, it would still leave a healthy chunk to make up for money spent on development efforts from the past several years.

Overall, *Ultima Online* clearly shipped before it was ready, but luckily, the game has mostly made good (and continues to make good) on its promise to keep improving the game. As other persistent world games come online, they are likely to face similar challenges in meeting gamers' expectations, and it should certainly be interesting to see how said challenges are met in the light of Origin's experiences.

Like the real world, *Ultima Online* is constantly evolving

Arcadia

The latest arcade and coin-op news

by Marcus Webb

Marcus Webb is the editor of *Replay* magazine.

Intel inside AMOA

About a dozen PC-based coin-op videogames were on display at AMOA Expo '97, a fall trade show held in Atlanta last October. All were on CD-ROM and most were configured to work with hardware specifications set forth by Intel's "Open Arcade Architecture Forum," though eight different system integrators and manufacturers are involved now ... with more to come. Some of the CD games shown in Atlanta were arcade adaptations of home videogame hits like *Quake* or *Warbirds*; others were originals being developed for the OAAF or National Amusement Network platforms like T-Rex from Angel Studios.

AMOA Expo should have passed a giant version of that "Intel inside" slogan motto on the Georgia World Congress Center building, where the exhibits were staged. Intel was inside, all right! This $24 billion computer chipmaker provided the keynote address, took a large booth, and together with its PC allies, beat the drum for the computer revolution to enter the arcade. Right now it's a small stream of product made under Intel's suggested technical specs. By next spring, Intel's promising a steady river of PC-based videogames aimed at the street and arcade market.

A PC that costs $2,700 can match or beat the latest $15,000 3D-polygon, texture-mapped simulator from traditional video factories, asserted Intel's VP and Content Group Director for Developer Relations Claude Leglise. Leglise said PC performance has increased tenfold since 1987 and will triple again in the next three years, specifically with reference to the ability to generate faster and better versions of motion 3D graphics. "We're on a constant quest to simulate reality," Leglise declared.

"What we've seen in every other market that shifted from proprietary hardware to open systems," said Leglise, "is an explosion of content and growth." He ventured that the computer industry's 20% to 30% growth rate could be expanded to include the public arena, pay-for-play videogame business as well.

CD game makers: "no exclusives"

RePlay asked the Intel guys one crucial question: Since system integrators or hardware manufacturers are anxious to tie up all the hot software under exclusive licenses (in order to force sales of their own hardware), what's so "open" about the OAAF idea? Don't we simply wind up with the same old proprietary systems, only now with CD-ROMs inside? What's the big advantage of having such a system? Isn't it like

having a jukebox, which is legally restricted to playing CDs from only one music label?

Claude Leglise had a ready answer. Hardware manufacturers, he said, can only work with about two or three software suppliers at a time. They simply won't be able to tie up all the software. Leglise didn't say so, but we gather that once a sufficient installed base of arcade PC hardware is in the field — say 3,000 to 5,000 units — then software makers can "sell around" the hardware makers and system integrators, directly to the distributors and/or the arcades.

RePlay learned another part of the answer by talking to leading and potential software suppliers on Developer's Row. We spoke to individuals like Diego Angel, CEO of Angel Studios, and Dave Adams from GT Interactive. "We don't want to do exclusive licenses," they said. For the software guys, the name of the game is maximum exposure on the coin-op level, leading to maximum sales when the game eventually goes to the home. The more systems and hardware platforms they license their games to, the more public exposure they will enjoy. The truth of this was seen at the Developer's Row section of AMOA Expo '97: Some of GT's top games have already been licensed to more than one coin-op platform.

Q-Zar and Champions file bankruptcy; CIE gets Virtuality assets

Q-Zar (laser tag equipment maker) and its LBE owner-operator parent company Q-Entertainment, Inc. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. It was announced on November 5. Months of debt restructuring failed to win sufficient investor confidence to gain new funding, so the firm named Coopers & Lybrand as its financial advisers and Vernex, Lilpfort, Bernhard, McPherson & Hand as its legal counsel. Interest payments to debenture holders was due October 30 but not paid, so the company is in default, Q-Zar confirmed. Three board members have resigned: Bob Harris, John Kearney and Steven Varsano. Remaining principals said they hoped to emerge from Chapter 11 with a stabilization plan.

Champions, the Northeastern regional arcade chain, closed the doors on its remaining stores on October 17 after filing for Chapter 7; six stores were affected. A spokesman said, "Reduced revenues, high occupancy costs, and recalcitrant landlords left Champions with no other options." The well-known chain had been under the ownership and direction of popular trade vets Frank Ash and Tom McAuliffe.

Virtuality's bankruptcy filing in Britain and the

U.S. (Chapter 11) has led to a notice that it is seeking authority to sell $12,000 worth of assets here, including office furniture, phones and a fax machine, computers and related machines, etc. Meanwhile, over in Europe, a Berlin-based firm called Cybermind Interactive Europe (CIE) has hired a core management team from Virtuality and acquired Virtuality's former business rights in Britain. Under a new firm to be called Cybermind UK, it now owns more than 1,200 installed VR systems worldwide. At press time it planned to exhibit at IAAPA and ATEI as part of a plan to build better VR machines at "radically reduced" prices, said execs.

LBE news:
Namco buys "XS" concept; Sega opens new GameWorks

Namco Cybertainment, already the largest arcade chain in America, is now moving into the Location Based Entertainment business. The company has acquired the rights to the "XS" title, theme, and concept from its former owner, Skyline Multimedia Entertainment, Inc., which will continue to own and run the first XS site in Times Square, New York City, with Namco remaining a revenue-sharing partner there. Namco hasn't decided how many XS sites to open or just how it may revamp the concept and content. But look for a major initiative, probably under a new "XS" division within the company. Kevin Hayes, president and CEO of Namco Cybertainment Inc., called for Namco LBEs at "premier sites across the country."

Sega GameWorks opened LBE number five in the LBE chain in Tempe, Arizona, on November 19. A related Internet contest promotion ran from November 10 to 15 on www.gameworks.com, offering a grand prize of airfare and lodging for two to the Tempe site for the opening.

Slamsite, a relative newcomer to the world of pay-for-play machine entertainment, has opened a new concept in arcades, which points up the growing convergence of arcade and (home) PC-based videogames. On November 14, a 15,000-square-foot facility in Puente Hills, California (Los Angeles suburb), opened with more than 100 high-powered networked PC systems.

Retroview

Anecdotes from computer and videogaming's past

The story of Night Trap

It's amazing how insignificant items can touch off very significant events. In this case I am referring to Night Trap, a crummy little Full Motion Video game that literally inspired the Senate investigation into videogame violence.

Night Trap was the creation of Tom Zito, a former Washington Post rock critic and freelance journalist. In 1986, Zito was hired by Nolan Bushnell, the founder of Atari, to be the vice president of marketing at Axlon, a company Bushnell purchased and updated for manufacturing high-tech robotic toys.

While working at Axlon, Zito asked Bushnell if he could look into interactive television. Bushnell approved the project but told him that he would need more funding than Axlon could provide.

> Axlon was in trouble. I put together this little kind of SWAT team to out how we should approach interactive TV, and what became clear ... was that we didn't have enough capita. I mean, we might have been able to film a prototype, but we never could have actually gotten a finished product.
>
> That was when Nolan basically said, "Hey, you came out here to be with me to be an entrepreneur. If you want to go do something, you're going to have to find some money."
>
> — Tom Zito

Zito found a willing partner in Hasbro, and the experiment became known as the Nemo Project, a collaboration between Axlon and Hasbro that was very short-lived. Hasbro became frustrated with Axlon's bureaucracy and threatened to kill Nemo if it didn't get complete control. Zito decided to abandon Axlon and go with his pet project, a move that ended his friendship with Bushnell.

Nemo was an interesting kluge of technologies. The people who designed it streamed video footage through a Colecovision game console to create interactive video scenes in 1988, while working on the project, Zito created Night Trap and Sewer Shark, two games that ended up reaching the market several years later.

Hasbro ultimately abandoned Nemo, and Zito ended up placing his games in

storage. He couldn't market them. They contained too much ROM-consuming digitized video to fit in a Nintendo or Sega cartridge. Zito could have put them on laser discs and released them as arcade games like Cinematronics did with Dragon's Lair, but laser disc games had long since failed in arcades.

As Sega prepared to release its CD drive, company executives contacted Zito and pitched him about making games for their system. When the company released its Sega CD peripheral in 1992, Sewer Shark and Night Trap were featured selections.

Night Trap was originally supposed to be an interactive edition of Nightmare on

Night Trap sold more than 400,000 copies after becoming the target of a Senate investigation on videogame violence

Elm Street, but when negotiations with the studio that owned the franchise fell through, Zito's writers ended up creating an original story about fledgling vampires attacking a group of mindless teenage girls holding a slumber party. Players assumed the role of a high-tech policeman assigned to protect the girls by catching the demons with booby traps.

In 1993, Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut began looking into videogame violence after hearing about Mortal Kombat, the fatality-laden fighting game that Acclaim had just released for the home market. When Nintendo provided the senator with a video showing a girl in a nightie being killed with a power-drill-driven, blood-sucking machine in Night Trap, the senator was outraged.

> I forget how I heard about Night Trap. You end with this attack scene on this woman in lingerie in her bathroom, which the creator of the game said was all meant to be a satire on Dracula, but nonetheless, I thought it sent out the wrong message.
>
> — Senator Joseph Lieberman

Interestingly, Night Trap had nearly vanished from store shelves before the Senate investigation. It was not much of a game, and its only draw was that it starred Dana Plato, the girl from the television show "Different Strokes," who went on to do a spread in Playboy magazine and get arrested for robbing a store.

After the Senate hearings, Night Trap became a hit. Led on by images of angry senators and a jiggling girl in a somewhat modest teddy, prurient videogame connoisseurs bought the game wherever they could find it. Instead of going from Sega CD to oblivion, Night Trap sold more than 400,000 units and made it on to the PC, Macintosh, 32X, and 3DO before its ultimate demise.

by Steven Kent

A frequent contributor to Next Generation, Steven Kent is the author of a forthcoming book on the history of videogames

LightWave 3D 5.5

❝❝ When we create games, we want a 3D package we can work with...instead of around. ❝❝

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❝❝ We used LightWave 3D to create our new game, Warbreeds. Believe me when I say we gave the features a work-out. Steamer helped us create flames and explosions that burst off the screen. And we used Morph Gizmo for mouth work and facial movements in some of our favorite scenes along with built-in Bones to bring our characters to life. Pumping it all through Metamation saved us tons of time and memory. Of course, we used MetaNURBS everywhere.

Then there's the stuff that really makes life easy. Like the ability to replace geometry in animation, so revisions are almost automatic. If you've used other packages, you know what a big deal that is. And a tool set so rich, you don't need a million plug-ins.

But what's really amazing is that LightWave 3D is so easy to learn and so hard to outgrow. ❝❝

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Paul Davies is a Senior Animator for Red Orb Entertainment, a Division of Broderbund Software, Inc. Their latest project is an upcoming real-time strategy game called "Warbreeds."

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Toolbox

The products that build your favorite games

I-Force Studio 2.0

Consumer level force feedback is one of the coolest developments in gaming over the last year or so (OK, there was also a 3D revolution, but that's another story). Before Immersion introduced the I-Force standard, however — and later, worked closely with Microsoft to get a standard force-feedback API into DirectX 5.0 — there was really little way to incorporate force feedback into a game without writing code for a specific piece of hardware. Once that hurdle was cleared, there remained the problem of how to design sensations — after all, tactile feedback isn't exactly easy to conceptualize. It has to actually be felt to know whether or not it works.

Which is why a tool like I-Force Studio, a toolkit for creating your own feedback sensations, is so handy (no pun intended). Best of all, for once with a product covered in this column, anyone can play around with it. It's available for free from the Immersion web site at www.force-feedback.com/iforce/iforce.html. The download is even pretty small. Be warned, though: As of this writing, the toolkit available at the site is still version 1.1. It provides most of the functionality but is missing some of the more advanced sensations like "texture."

On the whole, the toolkit is highly intuitive — no mean feat considering how nebulous the subject matter is. Designers begin by choosing one of 27 different "simple" sensations, like Spring or Damper, then adjust the parameters using nicely laid out visual interface boxes. The results can be felt immediately or even assigned to buttons by simply dragging an effect and dropping it into the button window. It's even possible to combine multiple effects — hit the stick with a rattling sine wave to simulate a machine gun, for example, and combine this with a steady push back and to the right to simulate the weapon's "pull."

The best thing about it, from a designer's perspective, is that the toolkit itself handles all the DirectX calls. Sensations are saved as resource files (tagged with an ".iif" extension), and the kit comes with its own DLL (Dynamic Link Library), which automatically loads the resource and performs the calls. Even an end user like a gaming hobbyist can use the tool to modify sensations within existing games — provided, of course, the original game

designer has also used the I-Force DLL. It is possible to modify the feedback within games that don't use the I-Force DLL, but such a project is a bit outside the scope of this article.

Which actually brings us to the one gripe about I-Force Studio: The documentation is a bit thin. This is perhaps

> If force feedback is the wave of the future, then here's the tool to lead the way

to be expected from a product that is so easily downloadable, but it is a minor annoyance nonetheless. While fairly thorough when covering the basics of sensation design and going over all the relevant parameters for each effect, it's of less help when trying to actually export those effects into an existing application. For games using the I-Force DLL, it's a snap — just edit the associated .iif files. For games that use only DirectX, it's less helpful. Perhaps this isn't a fair complaint, since the professionals who would be most interested in doing this would normally have all the DirectX documentation necessary in the first place, but for hobbyists, it's less than ideal.

Still, as a package, it works extremely well and can be somewhat addictive all on its own. One **Next Generation** staffer lost most of a weekend just playing around with various effects — the sheer novelty of the thing was enough. And hey, it's free: What have you got to lose?

I-Force Studio 2.0 provides an easy-to-understand graphical environment for designing force-feedback sensations — it's even fun just to play with on its own

DIST IN RANGE

SCORE   0000
HIGH SCORE 15000

TANK

1 FOLLOW ME
2 GO TO NAV
3 ATTACK
    PICK ME UP
    GET REPAIR
    GET RELOAD
7 HUNT

0 RECYCLE
SPACE ATTACK FIGHTER
ALT NO ACTION
SHIFT CANCEL

Battlezone takes real-time strategy to the front lines with truly revolutionary action-strategy.

You are the high-level Commander making decisions from your own war-ravaged tank. Lead your U.S. troops on a mission to gain control of a superior alien technology in the true "space race" against the Soviets...or cross enemy lines to the Soviet side. Only one super-power will survive the Battlezone... And it's all under your command.
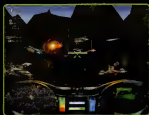
Full-Scale 3-D Action
Pilot one of 20 anti-gravity war machines, and wield 25 devastating weapons — including mortars, mines, and the Thumper Device which triggers on-the-fly earthquakes on the morphable terran.
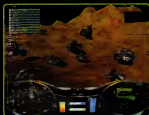
Complete Strategic Control
Coordinate full-scale attacks with over 30 unique units, such as tanks, infantry and mobile assault turrets. Call in artillery, deploy wingmen and manage resources — all from within your tank.

Dynamic First-Person Immersion
Lose your vehicle in battle, bail out, parachute to safety; then use your sniper rifle to take over another unit. Switch vehicles right on the battlefield of one of seven distinct moons or planets!

Actual Non-Hardware Accelerated Screenshot.

Are You a
Hardcore Gamer?

The **ultimate challenge** for
the serious **gameplayer**

The mere fact that you're reading **Next Generation** says a lot about what kind of gamer you really are, but have you ever wondered exactly how deep your skills and dedication really go? Here's your chance to find out ...

NOTE: In the interest of brevity, we have written the questions for a male reader. Also, this challenge was not written to be interpreted legalistically. If you played *Carnage Heart* for 9.5 hours, not 10, feel free to round up, and a similar attitude should be taken for the rest of the questions.

There's little doubt that most of us reading this magazine (especially this magazine) think of ourselves as hardcore gamers to the end. But there's hardcore, and then there's hardcore, and a vast gulf separates those who "merely" buy a half dozen games a month from the hawk-eyed, twitchy-fingered souls who have forgotten more about the life stories of fighting game characters than most ordinary folk will ever know.

The problem, however, has always been how to objectively measure one's exact degree of dedication. That is, until now. With the following landmark videogame challenge, **Next Generation** is enabling our readers to put an actual score on their passion. Painstakingly tested and scientifically proven, the following questionnaire is guaranteed to measure one's devotion to the interactive age — or at least generate some chuckles while trying.

All seriousness aside, folks, the only fair measure of one's love for gaming is how much you get out of it. However, from what we know of our own gaming habits and the habits of numerous other long-time gamers, certain patterns emerge, and certain anecdotes always seem to have a strangely familiar ring. Some make us laugh, others make us cringe, but if you've been there, you'll

understand. To borrow a tagline from Interplay, this challenge was created "by gamers, for gamers," and now the only question that remains is how you'll fare.

And just to put this all in context, as a touchstone for the extreme outer fringe of the hardest of the hardcore, we've included a collection of industry professionals' accounts of their most obsessive videogame moments. As you take the **Next Generation** challenge and read our professional accounts, you will probably find yourself saying, "I've done that" or "That sounds just like me." But if not, don't worry, there's always time to become hardcore, and **Next Generation** will always be your tool for doing so.

There is a total of 300 points in the challenge, but a "perfect score" is not possible, as the answers to some questions make it impossible to collect points for others. So, does everyone have your sharpened No. 2 pencils ready? Good luck, and remember, you are not a hardcore gamer unless ...
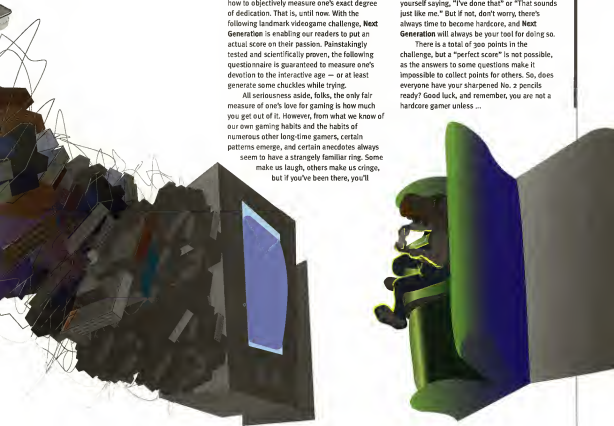
General **obsession**

(1 point each — possible total: 110 points with bonus)

The following are the character traits, material possessions, and general knowledge
that all hardcore gamers must have. There's nothing too embarrassing here, just
simple, obsessive behavior familiar to all serious gamers.

☐ 01. You have a definite favorite: Nintendo,
Sega, or Sony

☐ 02. You have a definite favorite: Intellivision
or Atari 2600

☐ 03. It's impossible for you to understand
how anyone could like Nintendo games

☐ 04. It's impossible for you to understand
how anyone could like Sega games

☐ 05. It's impossible for you to understand
how anyone could like Sony games

☐ 06. There are no less than three
videogame systems ready to play in your
house right now

☐ 07. You remember Alan Alda's Atari 400
commercials

☐ 08. There are at least four peripheral
controllers going unused in your home

☐ 09. You bought an arcade-style controller
just to play Street Fighter at home

☐ 10. At one point, you had a Sega CD and 32X
plugged into your Genesis

☐ 11. There are portable game machines
stashed throughout your house

☐ 12. You've owned a set of VR glasses

☐ 13. You quickly realized that good VR in
gaming is not yet a reality

☐ 14. You've played Doctyl Nightmore

☐ 15. You own a videogame soundtrack

☐ 16. You bought a bigger TV just for your games

☐ 17. There is switch box hooked to your TV
for quick changes between consoles

☐ 18. You've built a custom rack just
for your games

☐ 19. There's a room in your house known
as the "game room"

☐ 20. You own a Game Shark

☐ 21. You collect Game Shark codes

☐ 22. You've brought a tip sheet to school

☐ 23. You've played at least three Sega Model
3 arcade games

☐ 24. You were once considered the Street
Fighter king/queen of your arcade

☐ 25. You take the time to put in real high-
score initials — not just AAA (1 bonus point:
it's a code name like MAK or IOC)

☐ 26. You've never played Killer Instinct
and never will

☐ 27. You've built some device that would
allow you to push the buttons faster in
Track and Field

☐ 28. You've tried using slugs in an arcade
machine (1 bonus point: you made it work)

☐ 29. You've been to a Sega GameWorks

☐ 30. You've taken a road trip to a really good
arcade

☐ 31. While driving a real car, you've pretended
to be in a driving game (1 bonus point: you
got a ticket because of it)

☐ 32. You know the heads of all the
AM departments

☐ 33. You know Shigeru Miyamoto's complete
gameography (1 bonus point: you own his
complete gameography)

☐ 34. You know at least one producer from
Sega, Sony, and Nintendo

☐ 35. You know at least five enemies in the
Mario series

☐ 36. You know the name of the PlayStation-
based arcade board and who uses it

☐ 37. You know which arcade boards Virtua
Racing, Daytona USA, and Super GT were

made for, respectively

☐ 38. You can hum the tune to the original
Super Mario game in its entirety

☐ 39. You know the difference between the
regular Sonic music and the invincible
Sonic music

☐ 40. You can recite the Konami code
from memory

☐ 41. You know the FMV endings by heart
for every Tekken 2 character (1 bonus point:
you consider them important cinema)

☐ 42. You know what Nintendo means

☐ 43. You know what Sega stands for

☐ 44. You can name the presidents of all the
major videogame companies

☐ 45. You know the major and minor
differences in Mortal Kombat for SNES
and Genesis

☐ 46. You've tried to design your own game,
only to find out that the idea would never
work

☐ 47. You've programmed at least one
game on no matter how basic (or BASIC as
the case may be)

☐ 48. You've designed your own level for
Quake (1 bonus point: it was more fun
than any of the original levels)

☐ 49. You've sent in a game idea to a
publisher (1 bonus point: they called
you for a job interview)

☐ 50. You can do a fireball, dragon punch, and
a flash kick without looking at a move list or
ever messing it up

☐ 51. You've sent your resume to a
game company

☐ 52. You've sent your own review to
a videogame magazine (1 bonus point: if it
was published)

- ☐ 53. You've written an FAQ for any game

- ☐ 54. You've written an angry letter to Senator Lieberman

- ☐ 55. You complained to Sega about switching to cardboard boxes for Genesis games

- ☐ 56. You've sent away for a free T-shirt or patch from a game

- ☐ 57. You preordered *Final Fantasy VII* and stood in line to pick it up the day it arrived in the store

- ☐ 58. You've called at least one tip line and known more about the game than the person supposedly helping you

- ☐ 59. You've ever put your own statistics, including your name, into *NBA Live*

- ☐ 60. While putting yourself into *NBA Live*, you've lied to give yourself an advantage in height, weight, etc.

- ☐ 61. You've played on at least one online gaming site

- ☐ 62. You spend more time playing games than watching TV or listening to music

- ☐ 63. You have all the *Tekken 2* sub-bosses saved on a special and permanent memory card

- ☐ 64. You buy the new *GameDoy* or *Madden* every season

- ☐ 65. You've exchanged a good Christmas gift for a game you didn't get

- ☐ 66. You've played *Tomb Raider* until you needed a bandage for your thumb, then played some more

- ☐ 67. You've rented a notoriously bad game just to make fun of it

- ☐ 68. You've ordered at least three Japanese import games and altered your system in some way so that you could play them (1 bonus point: you damaged your machine while trying to alter it)

- ☐ 69. You can convincingly pretend to never have been excited about the

possibilities of FMV in gaming

- ☐ 70. You know who/what the Coconut Monkey is

- ☐ 71. You remember *Crack Down*

- ☐ 72. You've read *Game Over* or *Phoenix* and refer to them often

- ☐ 73. You've left a game on overnight because it couldn't be saved

- ☐ 74. You've gotten yourself into trouble at school or work for playing games at an inappropriate time

- ☐ 75. You organized the first multiplayer game ever in your office

- ☐ 76. You've formed your own *Quake* or *Diablo* clan

- ☐ 77. You've spent more time downloading a game demo than actually playing it

- ☐ 78. You've called a videogame company for information on a new game

- ☐ 79. You've started your own fan web site for a game or system

- ☐ 80. You know all the IGN affiliate web sites

- ☐ 81. You have your own IGN affiliate web site

- ☐ 82. You actually check the archives on videogame web sites

- ☐ 83. You have videogame bumper stickers on your car

- ☐ 84. You still have a Jaguar sticker on your car

- ☐ 85. You've read a game manual for a new game on the way home from the store (1 bonus point: you were driving)

- ☐ 86. You've made a major videogame purchase with money slated for something more important, like a college fund

- ☐ 87. You believe there is nothing more important — especially not a college fund

- ☐ 88. You've been blacklisted for returning too many games to Electronics Boutique

- ☐ 89. You argued that EA Sports games were far superior on Genesis than SNES

- ☐ 90. You've blamed a videogame loss on a faulty controller

- ☐ 91. You ever hopelessly longed for a game pictured on a console box, only to be disappointed by its failure to make it to market

- ☐ 92. You've used the word "paradigm" in a videogame discussion

- ☐ 93. You've mentally played *Tetris* with real-world objects

- ☐ 94. You've played an action game until your eyes dried out from not blinking

- ☐ 95. You've been polite to a nongamer in a discussion about *Myst*

- ☐ 96. You developed a new passion for techno music from playing *Wipeout*

- ☐ 97. After deciding you can't win in a racing game, you turn your car around to sabotage the race leaders

- ☐ 98. No matter how many times you've played it, you still prefer the original *Super Mario Kart* over the N64 version

- ☐ 99. You fell in love when you found out Samus Aran was a woman

- ☐ 100. You've never read a videogame manual (unless it was while driving home)

ng special

Challenge Level

(1 point each — possible total: 55 points with bonus)

More game-specific, the following section gauges your dedication, skill, and game-playing stamina. These are the game challenges that separate the real players from the casual users and the hardcore from the lightweights.

☐ 01. After finding all 120 stars in *Super Mario 64*, you kept playing, just in case there was a 121st, or Luigi, or just to look around more (1 bonus point: you braved a 120 star save to friends so they could explore)

☐ 02. There is at least one pad of graph paper in your house filled with sketches of level designs

☐ 03. You know Guile's "handcuff" trick

☐ 04. You have more than 10,000 career *Quake* frags

☐ 05. You know the *Quake* routes for every level

☐ 06. You've made your own *Quake* skin

☐ 07. You've played *Quake* with just the ax

☐ 08. After beating *Tomb Raider* you went back and found all the useless secrets

☐ 09. You can fight a sophisticated (not button-mashing) battle with every *Virtua Fighter* character

☐ 10. You've played more than 100 multiplayer matches of *Command & Conquer*

☐ 11. You know all the lyrics in *PaRappa the Rapper* by heart (1 bonus point: you sing them at inappropriate times)

☐ 12. You received an "A" on every level in *Nights*

☐ 13. You've successfully navigated all the shortcuts in *San Francisco Rush*

☐ 14. You've placed first on all the tracks in *WaveRace 64* (forward and reversed)

☐ 15. You've played a whole season of *World Series Baseball* despite a miserable record

☐ 16. You've charted the moon gates in an *Ultima* game

☐ 17. You've played every *Bard's Tale*

☐ 18. You've broken the backboard in the original *Dr. J vs. Larry Bird*

☐ 19. You know the automatic goal move in *NHL Hockey* and in what version it was removed

☐ 20. You can figure out the pattern to any 16-bit boss in less than two minutes

Endurance is key

(possible total: 10 points)

Sometimes all it takes is the sheer willpower to just keep playing. The following mile markers are for the hardcore only. (Give yourself only the points for the goal that matches your best performance.)

You've ever played a game for:

six hours straight (2 points)

eight hours straight (4 points)

10 hours straight (6 points)

12 hours straight (8 points)

more than 12 hours straight and then had to call in sick to work due to lack of sleep (10 points)

Ian Verchere
Radical Entertainment

This is a true story, sadly enough. And it's important to remember that I was single at the time. I needed quality concentration time to finish *Zelda* for the Super NES because I was completely hooked on the game but I was stuck without the Magic Hammer. So I went to a cabin on an island (between Vancouver and Victoria) that had electricity, a wood stove, an outhouse, and most importantly, no phone. Besides a Super NES and the *Zelda* cart, I packed some food, my cat, and an old Commodore 1702 monitor that I bought second-hand for $20. Once at the cabin, I stoked the wood stove, ate soup from the can, neglected my cat, and finished the game in about 72 hours straight, including power naps.

Chris Nicolella
Tiger Toys

I was so engrossed with *Mario 64* when it first came out, I played it nonstop for two days. One day while I was playing, an earthquake started to shake my home in Pacifica, California. The apartment was shaking and my girlfriend was screaming, and where were my priorities at this possible life-threatening moment? Making sure I had enough time to quit out of the level I was playing and save my progress before we lost power. Thankfully, I was able to save the game in time ... oh yeah, my girlfriend and I weren't injured from the earthquake. P.S. Once power was restored, I beat the game three hours later.

Scott Hawkins
Sega

While I was getting my computer science degree at UC Santa Barbara, I worked part-time at Panasonic as a Unix system administrator and research programmer. While working there, I learned how to make my own 10 Base-T Ethernet cables and connectors. I liked network games so much that I bought my own eight port 10 Base-T Ethernet hub (this was five years ago) and went to the local computer hardware store where they let me and a friend build the cables with their tools. One of the cables was 188 feet long. We then popped a small hole in the ceiling of my apartment and wired the cable through the ceiling, over two apartments and into my friend's apartment three doors away. Long live the hunt of the "Red Guy," Doritos, Mountain Dew, and *Doom II* and *Gaucho deathmatches* until well after the sun comes up.

Peter Hushvahtov
Ion Storm

I get super-excited about some games. So excited that I act crazy and that's all I can

think or talk about. I have what could be called a true passion for videogames. I started playing games back in Russia. I remember waiting in long, long lines to play *Tetris* — lines that sometimes would get physical. Once I had to wait for about two hours to get my 15 minutes of playing time. So I waited and waited and then it was finally my turn to play. I started playing the machine and suddenly a fight broke out behind me — young teenagers screaming, punching, and kicking. Other people would run from a dangerous 30-man fight, but I kept playing until the security guard came in, stopped the fight, and shut down the videogame hangout for two weeks. That's when it went downhill for me.

John Romero
Ion Storm

I was so hardcore into arcade games in the early '80s that I was spending all my paper route money on them and not doing my homework. So my parents banned me from the arcade for a month, but I couldn't deal with it. After a couple days of *Asteroids* restriction," I went straight to the local pizza place after school and played *Asteroids*. My father drove up, came in the arcade, smashed my head into the *Asteroids* machine, dragged me outside into the truck, took me home, tore off my glasses, and proceeded to beat me up. After my month's restriction, I was immediately back at the arcade.

Eugene Jarvis
Midway

In 1980, games were designed in three to six months of serious haste. *Defender* was no exception, and the night before the annual AMOA arcade show, there was serious shot to get done. It was about 4 p.m., and we were stuffing our faces with Big Macs, resting up after some nasty grudge matches when we realized that we needed to write an attract mode and high score system. Teams today often spend months on such fluff and backstory screens. We had 12 hours.

To compound the situation, our development system was on the rag. The 10,000 lines of *Defender* assembly code took so long to assemble (30 minutes), that the $30,000 1MHz 8" floppy disk Motorola Exorcisor system would likely crash before it was completed. So about a week earlier the code was downloaded into RAM and all further changes were made as machine code patches. With the debugger, we scanned memory for what looked like a spare section of RAM and decided to stuff the attract mode and high-score stuff there.

Since we had done a game in three months with an entire art, programming, and sound team consisting of two people, for the last week of the project,

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☐ 21. You've finished at least one Infocom text adventure

☐ 22. You know which Infocom games support "oops" and "x" and which don't

☐ 23. You've blocked an extra point in the original *Madden*, just to see the point be given to the opponent's team anyway

☐ 24. You know the Bo Jackson automatic touchdown play in *Tecmo Bowl*

☐ 25. You've ever successfully used the "Bloodlust" spell in *WarCraft II*

☐ 26. You can play *Tetris* until it ceases to become harder, and you only quit when you get bored

☐ 27. You've been involved in a *Bomberman* four-way spoil (1 bonus point: you initiated it)

☐ 28. You know all the secret character codes in the original *NBA Jam*

☐ 29. You could still get 100% shooting percentage in every bonus level of *Galaga*

☐ 30. You've successfully fought the dogs that crash through the window in *Resident Evil* (as opposed to running away)

☐ 31. You can effectively use two guns at once in *Virtua Cop*

☐ 32. You know the 99-second cheat in the original *Track and Field*

☐ 33. You know when to use hyperspace in *Asteroids* (1 bonus point: you consider it a mystical power)

☐ 34. You've seen all the cut scenes in *Ms. Pac-Man*

☐ 35. You've successfully bred a healthy Norn in *Creatures* and kept it alive long enough to breed it again

☐ 36. You always let a few Lemmings die to hear them scream, but never enough to lose the level

☐ 37. You've beaten at least one first-person shooter that wasn't developed by id

☐ 38. You know what Shun Di's drinking does for his abilities

☐ 39. You've played through *FFVII* more than three times

☐ 40. You've finished all of the *Final Fantasy* games released in the U.S.

☐ 41. You've finished at least one import *Final Fantasy* game not officially brought to the U.S.

☐ 42. You've finished all the *Final Fantasy* import games despite the fact you don't know Japanese

☐ 43. You've beaten at least three rented games

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without returning them late

☐ 44. You've beaten more than one game on the very first day

☐ 45. After beating a game, you played it all over again just to see if you could beat it faster

☐ 46. You've earned enough free lives in a game to give yourself enough time for a bathroom break

☐ 47. You understood the opening cinematics for *Panzer Dragoon I or II*

☐ 48. You've entered and won a videogame competition of any kind (1 bonus point: you won more than $100)

☐ 49. You play all your favorite games on the hardest setting

☐ 50. You've taken a picture of a high score or made a videotape of an especially good videogame performance

What's in your closet?
(1 point each — possible total: 20 points)

One of the easiest ways to determine how much of a hardcore gamer you are is by tallying all the videogame systems you've called your own. You're not a hardcore gamer unless you've owned:

☐ 3DO
☐ Amiga
☐ Arcade Game
☐ Atari VCS / 2600
☐ Atari 5200
☐ Atari 7800
☐ Colecovision / Adam
☐ Intellivision
☐ Neo Geo
☐ NES
☐ SNES
☐ Nintendo 64
☐ Odyssey 2
☐ Pong / Pong clones
☐ Sega Genesis
☐ Sega Master System
☐ Sega Saturn
☐ Sony PlayStation
☐ TurboGrafx-16
☐ Vectrex

ng special

We're a little concerned if ...

(1 point each — possible total: 40 points with bonus)

Fun is fun, but the following examples push the limits of ordinary obsession to a worrisome level. Score a lot of points in this section and you know you're hardcore.

7:45AM

☐ 01. The first thing you do with a new game is check out ALL the options

☐ 02. You've beaten a novice in any game by as much as you possibly can because you just couldn't stand the idea of going easy on them, then bragged mercilessly about the victory, just to be cruel

☐ 03. You've become arch rivals with another player in the arcade by high-score initials only

☐ 04. You've deliberately defied a parental order not to go to the arcade or play games at home because you knew games were worth the potential punishment

☐ 05. You've ever been waiting outside of a closed arcade when the owner shows up to open shop

☐ 06. You've shopped around for a better token exchange rate

☐ 07. You've lied to an attendant to get a free game at an arcade

☐ 08. You've spent more than $500 on a single arcade game

☐ 09. You consider payday and game-buying day to be synonymous

☐ 10. You've used a videogame to predict the outcome of a real sports game (1 bonus point: you've bet money on the outcome)

☐ 11. You've been more than $100 on a videogame competition (1 bonus point: you won)

☐ 12. You've considered dropping out of school or quitting a job to join the Professional Gamers League

☐ 13. You failed a class because of spending too much time playing games

☐ 14. You were excited by Mortal Monday

☐ 15. You know exactly what you were doing on Sonic Tuesday

☐ 16. You noticed Lara lost weight from the original *Tomb Raider* to *Tomb Raider II*

☐ 17. You've tried to find hidden naughty bits in any game

☐ 18. You've bought a special case of beer for a night of gameplaying with friends

☐ 19. You've wished you could get in the Game Players' "box" or drink a beer with Bill Donohue

☐ 20. You worried about Sonic's career after he was excluded from *Knuckle's Chaotics*

☐ 21. You think videogame characters have careers

☐ 22. You eat *Donkey Kong* or *Sonic* spagettios on a regular basis

☐ 23. You've written fan fiction based on a game

management splurged and doubled the team size. We added two ace coders from the Williams pinball department, MIT guru Larry DeMar, and veteran sub-coder Paul Dussault.

Since DeMar was the most furious coder in existence, we gave him the attract mode. Dussault and Sam Dicker created the high score table/entry, while I continued to hack game code. Around midnight, the first rough cut of the attract mode was going, and the high score entry was progressing nicely. I had knocked off a couple of crash bugs, and seeing the game, I actually got to wave three. This was a new record. It got me thinking that although unlikely, a particularly heroic player might actually make wave five. Since all astronauts would probably be dead by then, the game might not prove very interesting beyond that point. So I figured what the hell, I'd replenish the astronauts every fifth wave, even though no one would ever see it little did I know at the time that within months of its release, marathon *Defender* players would play over 72 hours straight, completing thousands of waves).

After a couple of sixes of Diet Coke, DeMar was crankin' and it was time to load all the code and give it a whirl. The fluff pages, score table, and attract screens looked good. We tweaked a few coordinates and it was time to burn EPROMS. It was 4 a.m. The state of the art 16k/8kbit EPROMS (today chips have 1,000 times the capacity) took forever to burn. We plugged them into the prototype game and powered the sucker up. Nothing. We were screwed. Had we burned the wrong memory locations? Were the chips plugged into the right sockets? About then the smell of burning chips wafted through the room. Red hot flames flickered above the board. DeMar doused the flames with the rest of his Diet Coke, and we did a post mortem. We had just converted a *Defender* board into an $800 space heater. The ROMS had been plugged in backwards, shorting out the power supply.

We scrounged a new board and burned a new set of ROMS. It was now 6 a.m. If it didn't work now it was all over. The show opened at nine o'clock, and empty game cabinets were awaiting program chips. We double-checked the ROMS for bent pins and polarity. We prayed to all gods real and digital and turned on the juice. The sucker worked. We made duplicates, took a shower, put on our suits, and arrived at the show at 8:45 a.m. to plug in the chips. At 9 a.m. *Defender* made its debut.

Epilogue: The game magazines rated *Defender* a bomb because the controls were too complicated. *Pac-Man* was also felt to be a loser. Game of the show was Namco's *Rally-X*. Those magazines are no longer in business.

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John Grigsby
Acclaim Coin-op

I was so obsessed with arcade games that one year my parents gave me a box full of quarters for Christmas. I would often drive fifteen miles to the local budget theater and buy a movie ticket just to get into the arcade. It had *Blaster*, a difficult game to find. Now I own more than 15 classic machines, distributed about my apartment, my garage, and various rooms at work. I once rented a Ryder truck and drove 500 miles to L.A. on a work night just to pick up several hard-to-find games some operator was selling. I had to sleep in the truck in back of a Denny's until he showed up in the morning. Realizing I was never going to make it back in time, I called in sick from a gas station. It was worth it, though, because I've never seen another *Reactor*, *Mad Planets*, or *Warrior* for sale (and mine aren't!).

Ed Logg
Atari Games

During the development of *Asteroids*, Owen Rubin, one of my co-workers, would always stay late to play the game after I left. Of course, I would come in the morning and see ORR on the high score table. So at the suggestion of another co-worker, probably Ed Rotberg, I made sure any score with initials "ORR," "_OR," "OR_," or "O_R" would simply be removed. The next day Owen told us he had found a bug in the game. Naturally, we played dumb and told him he must be mistaken because that could not happen. He eventually found out what was going on, but don't go back and try this on *Asteroids* because we had to take it out. Easter eggs like this were frowned upon back in the old days.

John Botti
Black Ops

I had been working as a freelance videogame programmer, writing games on TurboGrafx CD and Sega CD systems. I was working out of a 400-square-foot, roach-infested Hollywood apartment located on Normandie between Hollywood and Sunset Blvd. I lived in a building that housed drug dealers and crack addicts. Times were tight, but I was happy writing videogames. I wanted to leave that neighborhood badly, but when you're in debt, have little or no money, and on your own, it's very difficult to save the $1,500 you need for a deposit on a new apartment.

So even though I'd witnessed several gang busts, police raids, murder scenes, etc., I called 1609 North Normandie "home" and tried to make the best of it. There was a strange irony between the violent action

- ☐ 24. You know all the bios for all the game magazine editors
- ☐ 25. You have memorized and can quote the *Donkey Kong Country* vs. *Mortal Kombat* argument from the movie *Billy Madison*
- ☐ 26. You buy even the worst game magazines just to be sure you won't miss anything
- ☐ 27. You saw either the movie *Swingers* or *Mall Rats* just because you heard there was some videogame footage in them
- ☐ 28. You still think Saturn has a chance to overtake PlayStation and N64
- ☐ 29. You own a PlayStation link cable and have used it
- ☐ 30. After buying the SNES version of *Mortal Kombat*, you bought the Genesis version just to get the blood

- ☐ 31. You've broken at least one controller by slamming it on the floor in frustration
- ☐ 32. You're saving unopened games for collector's value (1 bonus point: some of them are actually worth money)
- ☐ 33. You've ever dreamed the solution to a videogame puzzle, only to find out in the morning that you were right
- ☐ 34. You've ever dreamed that you were in a videogame
- ☐ 35. You think it was a bad idea for **Next Generation** to give a cover to *Blasto*
- ☐ 36. You've ever thought that you had some kind of problem because you loved games so much
- ☐ 37. You wonder why Timothy Hutton is on the box for *A Mind Forever Voyaging*

Social life suffers

(1 point each — possible total: 40 points with bonus)

It's one thing to spend your free time playing games, but when your passion for games starts interfering with your normal social life, that's when you join the ranks of the hardcore.
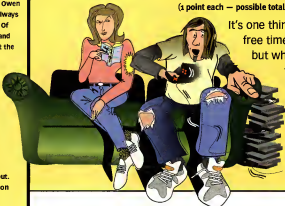
- ☐ 01. You've pretended to like someone just for their games (1 bonus point: you actually learned to like them)
- ☐ 02. You've convinced yourself a girl was attractive just because she liked videogames
- ☐ 03. You've broken a date to finish a game that could've easily been finished after the date
- ☐ 04. You've talked your date into watching you play a game (1 bonus point: you actually got her interested)
- ☐ 05. You've taken a date to an arcade and not left when she got bored
- ☐ 06. You would drive further to find a *Virtua Fighter 3* machine than you ever would to meet a date
- ☐ 07. You've failed an ultimatum from a

girlfriend in favor of videogames ("It's either me or that game tonight." "Well, I guess I'll call you tomorrow then.")

- ☐ 08. You've ever put on a videogame just for background noise when guests come over
- ☐ 09. You make your dinner decisions by what arcade games the restaurants have in their lobbies
- ☐ 10. You've ever snuck into E3 (1 bonus point: if more than once)
- ☐ 11. You've ever driven a really long way, only to be turned away at the doors of E3
- ☐ 12. You've used vacation days to visit a game company headquarters, knowing full well you wouldn't get any further than the parking lot
- ☐ 13. You've taken your PlayStation on vacation with you (1 bonus point: you bought a new game while on vacation)

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☐ 14. The local EB clerks know you by name (1 bonus point: and you know theirs)

☐ 15. You prefer to be called by your *Quake* name (1 bonus point: if it's something creepy like The Undertaker)

☐ 16. You wished a character in a game was real to have as a (girl)friend

☐ 17. You consider a six-second "load time" a serious problem

☐ 18. You belonged to a college dorm videogame league

☐ 19. You've gone to a party and ended up in the host's bedroom playing *NHL Hockey* on a Genesis

☐ 20. You've dressed as a game character for a party (1 bonus point: it wasn't Halloween)

☐ 21. You have well-known and vehemently enforced house rules for any videogame

☐ 22. You use *Madden*-isms or other videogame talk among friends

☐ 23. You've paid to see a movie based on a videogame

☐ 24. You refused to see the *Street Fighter* movie because you didn't feel Jean Claude Van Damme was man enough to play Guile

☐ 25. You've ever tried to explain to your mom that your *Leisure Suit Larry* game was not pornography

☐ 26. You've stolen money from your mom, dad, or girlfriend to buy a game or go to an arcade

☐ 27. You've ever considered resorting to violence in a videogame debate

☐ 28. You've ever considered a friend less intelligent for his/her views on videogames

☐ 29. You've ever settled a personal score with a videogame duel (1 bonus point: you won)

☐ 30. You've ever argued the Jaguar was/wasn't a true 64-bit system

☐ 31. You've ever argued who could win in a fight, Mario or Sonic

☐ 32. You've permanently lost a good friend because of a Sega vs. Nintendo argument

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The **Next Generation** reader

(1 point each — possible total: 10 points)

An easy way to spot potential hardcore gamers is to simply look at who's reading **Next Generation**. But it goes deeper than that. To read the magazine is one thing, but to really get involved is the true sign of a hardcore gamer. The following examples represent the kind of commitment to **Next Generation** (and consequently the videogame market) that only hardcore gamers have. And thus, you're not a hardcore gamer unless ...

☐ Your bookshelf contains a nearly complete library of **Next Generation** magazines

☐ You've begged **Next Generation** in vain for a copy of **NG** issue one

☐ You can clearly identify the difference between ads and editorial in **Next Generation**

☐ You've written an angry letter to **Next Generation**

☐ You've disagreed with something in **Next Generation**

☐ so vehemently that you swore off the magazine forever

☐ You've applied for a job with **Next Generation**

☐ You've accused **Next Generation** of having a Nintendo bias

☐ You've accused **Next Generation** of having a Sony bias

☐ You've accused **Next Generation** of having a Sega bias

☐ You've accused **Next Generation** of having a PC bias

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games I was contracted to write upstairs and the gang warfare that was going on downstairs. As time went on, the concept of an urban combat game grew on me, and I began putting together a design. I often went out into the city, armed with only my cheap 8mm video camera, looking for reference. I'd scout for locations, characters, and objects for my game. But what I really needed was fire and smoke animations. Realistic fire and smoke was always on my mind. I tried recording small fires and smoke, but nothing seemed to give me the "big, explosive" look I was after. The problem plagued me until April of 1992.

I had been at a meeting in the San Fernando Valley and was coming back into Hollywood and remember seeing huge tornado-shaped clouds of dark smoke emanating from various points all over the city. I suddenly got very excited because now there was smoke everywhere! I had been so focused on the game I was working on that I didn't know that I was driving into the '92 Los Angeles Riots. As I drove down Hollywood Blvd., a strange sense came over me. Something was not right. There was anarchy in the air. People were openly looting in broad daylight. Shop owners were standing on the sidewalks brandishing shotguns, ready to kill. But there were no police in sight. It was like an episode of the "Twilight Zone."

The next morning I awoke to a city in ruins. I walked to the 7-Eleven a half block away, only to find it literally burned to the ground, with 14 police officers standing around. The store was still smoldering, so I ran back to my apartment, grabbed my camera, and hit the road. I figured it would be safer now that the riots were "over" I could still record fires, smoke, and burnt-out structures. I cruised down Hollywood Blvd. with both windows of my 1978 Toyota Corolla rolled down. I could shoot out both windows and figured I would stay in the car to reduce risk.

I couldn't find much on Hollywood Blvd., so I decided to dig a little deeper. I heard there was more action down Normandie, so I decided to investigate. As I approached the intersection of Normandie and 3rd, I found what I was looking for. Not only smoldering ruins, but a massive crowd standing in the foreground in disbelief. On each side of the street, the two-story shopping centers were burned down to the ground and gutted by fire. As I pulled up to the red light, I noticed a car in front of me stopped at the light. I slowed down, leaving my foot on the brake so I could roll slowly up to the car in front of me while I shot video out of the window. With my head in the eyepiece of the video camera, I crept forward slowly. What I saw was unbelievable. Hundreds of disenchanted people in the foreground,

and in the background, billowing smoke against a blue sky.

As I taped the scene I was thinking, this footage is amazing! Then I heard a distant chanting. I looked up, and there was still some space left between me and the car in front of me. I held the camera steady on the car door and continued to inch forward. Then the chanting got louder. And louder. Cahhh-mehhh-rraaa!

I looked up and noticed my rearview mirror was full of angry gang members racing towards my car. I looked back down into my eyepiece, then realized, "They're coming after me!!!" By now, there were at least a dozen gang bangers all over my little Toyota. There were guys on the roof jumping up and down. There were two guys in my right window and two guys in my left window. One guy grabbed the back of my neck and tried to pull me out of the car. Another guy from the right window was trying to yank my camera out of my hands. I saw my life flash before me and expected guns to come out. By this time, the entire crowd was chanting, "CA-ME-RA! CA-ME-RA!"

Although the riots were technically "over," I was definitely in the wrong place at the wrong time. There were no police around for miles. I expected the cold steel of a gun barrel at my temple. I looked up into my rearview mirror, and all I could see was more angry people racing toward my car. I slammed on the gas — my car leapt forward the remaining few feet and slammed into the car in front of mine. My car stalled. With my right hand still trying to keep my camera and my precious footage, my left hand reached over to start the car, but it wouldn't start. By this time, the two guys on my left were pulling me out of the car. I knew if I reached the pavement, I was a dead man. I looked up, and even though the light was still red, the car in front of me had disappeared. Now, my left arm was being pulled out of the car. I decided to trade my video camera and potential game footage for my life. I let go, reached over to the gear shift, shoved it into park, twisted the key, and vrooooom!!!!! The engine started!!! I pulled the stick back to drive and hit the gas. My car jumped through the intersection, leaving people falling off my hood and roof.

My heart still racing, I zig-zagged through the back streets of Hollywood until I reached my apartment. No one followed. I failed my mission of obtaining footage but managed to escape with my life.

Howard Schwartz
ASC Games
When I worked for Sega, I had a Genesis hooked up in my bathroom. I think that says it all.

Some things **are just sad**
(1 point each — possible total: 15 points)

We had to draw the line somewhere, and the following examples go beyond the scope of healthy appreciation into the realm of possible madness. And although we don't actually approve of any of these, we're still willing to give you some credit for being so devoted. You may be hardcore, but you're also a little sad if...

☐ 01. You have a Sonic or Chun Li tattoo

☐ 02. You can actually pull off an 80-hit combo in *Killer Instinct*

☐ 03. You've spent an entire weekend playing games in your underwear

☐ 04. You ordered in pizza while playing games in your underwear and didn't bother getting dressed for the deliveryman

☐ 05. The following Monday you bragged to friends about spending your entire weekend playing games in your underwear

☐ 06. You spent two hours trying to make the "Nude Raider" code work

☐ 07. You created your own "Nude Raider" images and posted them online

☐ 08. You've ignored chest pains to continue playing a game

☐ 09. You've ever paused *Street Fighter* to see Chun Li's underwear

☐ 10. You've turned on the Atari Jaguar VLM after taking some kind of hallucinogenic drug

☐ 11. You've ever said: "I love you, Mario"

☐ 12. You've ever said: "I love you, Sonic"

☐ 13. You've ever said: "I love you, Crash"

☐ 14. You've ever said: "I love you, Lara"

☐ 15. You've read this far and would keep going if only there were more quiz questions

What your **score means**

If you scored:

0-24   **Button Masher:** Face it, you haven't been in an arcade since the days of Chuck E. Cheese. Maybe you picked up this magazine by mistake

25 - 74   **Casual Gamer:** Your idea of thrilling gameplay is calculating number differentials in *Myst*

75 -149   **Gamer:** You like games, sure, but they aren't quite a matter of life and death to you (yet), are they?

150-224   **Hardcore:** Games are a matter of life and death to you. Congratulations

225-274   **Next Generation:** If you're not working in the game industry, you should be

275+   **Sad:** OK, we're impressed, but we're also more than a little bit scared, too

CORRECT

CONGRATULATIONS, THE HOMERUN COUNTS. YOU
OBVIOUSLY KNOW YOUR BASEBALL AND ARE EXACTLY
THE KIND OF FAN WE MADE VR BASEBALL™ 99 FOR.

*CHECK OUT THE DEMO
AT WWW.VRSPORTS.COM*

VRBASEBALL **99**™

Actual screen shot.

VR Baseball™ 99. It's a smarter, more accurate baseball game created specifically for baseball enthusiasts like yourself. People who appreciate an AI smart enough to know that **Kenny Lofton** should score from 2nd on a gapper to the wall; that a pitcher should walk **Mark McGwire** with a base open and the game on the line; and that **Raul Mondesi's** gun is strong enough to skip the cut off man and go straight home. This isn't just another baseball game. This is baseball.

VR Baseball 99 has detailed baseball animations including motions for collision. When a runner breaks up a double play and slides into second base, you can see the shortstop get knocked on his butt. **Andruw Jones** will dive to catch hard line drives, and baserunners round the bases instead of making perpendicular cuts. We've also quickened the pace of baseball by adding a variety of quick key short cuts to speed up gameplay, and by adding an innovative menuless pitching interface that let's you pitch to a nearly infinite number of locations instantly. Which means you're now able to throw a **Greg Maddux** fastball without tipping your hand to your opponent.

This is it. The baseball game for baseball purists. So, again, congratulations on passing our test. And now, to reward yourself, head over to your local video game store and pick up a copy of VR Baseball 99. Play what you've been missing.

Available March 1998.

Smarter AI really understands baseball, and has true player attitude. Cecil Fielder doesn't bunt, pitchers are pulled when they get shelled, and fielders are strategically shifted. From shattered bats to ball players talking smack, it's all here.

A "smart camera" always selects the best angle for gameplay in real time. You'll see the players, even the outfielders, up close and in full detail as you make the play. So now when players like Derek Jeter stab a line drive, you'll be right on top of the action.

Fielding Practice and "Homerun Challenge"— two bonus arcade style games. See what it's like to make a diving catch through the eyes of Jim Edmonds, or challenge guys like Tino Martinez and get your name up on the leader board in the Homerun Challenge.

A Meeting of
the Minds

Next Generation invites six of videogaming's most prominent figures to meet and discuss the state of the interactive art. The result? A frank and insightful perspective from the front line of videogame creation

Recently, **Next Generation** gathered six of videogaming's leading luminaries, sat them around a table, and invited them to share their views on the state of the industry.

The attendees (from left to right in photograph), Brett Sperry of Westwood Studios, Dave Perry of Shiny Entertainment, Peter Molyneux of newly formed Lionhead Studios, Jeremy Smith of Core Design, DMA Design Chief David Jones, and Elite creator David Braben, were happy to mull over many aspects of what has become one of the world's most valuable — and valued by those who take part in it — entertainment mediums.

lazy — they have to go out and get the press excited about an idea. Then the marketing people can see it's viable and that people are really interested. You really can't expect anybody who's seen the tremendous figures of *Command & Conquer* and *Tomb Raider* to take any other attitude. We can produce original games, and we will produce original games.

NG: Perhaps the answer is to shrink the resources, use smaller teams. That would take the financial pressure off.

DP: We're reducing the risk with *Fly by Wire* by

Unless you've got the time to play it, you can't figure out those little touches that make a game special

Peter Molyneux

The interview wasn't exactly the easiest **Next Generation** has ever conducted, but this meeting of minds was a landmark in the magazine's history. **Next Generation** hopes it proves enlightening.

Originality: a lost cause?

NG: Looking around the industry today, the amount of clones and "me-too" titles seems to be more prevalent than ever. Why do you feel the videogame industry has developed in this fashion?

David Braben: The risk factor seems to drive certain companies more than others. A return on the investment and balancing the spreadsheet is seen as more important than gameplay. If you're trying to sell a game to a publisher, the first thing they ask is, "What's it like? What other game is it similar to? Is it like *Command & Conquer*?" And you find yourself being subtly driven down a certain route. That's why we've got 68 million C&C clones.

NG: So what do you see as being the solution?
Dave Perry: We're getting around it at Shiny just making something different — just doing it. At the moment, everyone's scratching their heads trying to figure out what to do next. We're doing a model helicopter simulator. It's never been done before, and the people that have played it go on for hours — they love it. But the problem is convincing a publisher that it's viable because it looks nothing like *Tomb Raider.*
Peter Molyneux: You can't blame the marketing people, though. Developers just have to be less

having a two-man team. We're taking the gamble. We've been in these arguments with programmers who say we're all lazy and don't try to make new genres, and what do they go and do? They go and make another *Quake* clone. So we're taking a risk with this game, but we've tried to cut down on the risk by having two people make the game. If it looks like it's going to be a hit, and the press is all leaping up and down, then we'll hire the rest of the people needed to get it finished and polished.

NG: Brett, how do you feel about Westwood having made *Command & Conquer*, just about the most copied game around?
Brett Sperry: You were asking the question earlier — how do we get around it? And the real challenge for the development community is to look at the established genres and try to figure out how to take the next step. *Command & Conquer* was born of a perceived gap in the market that started with *Dune 2*, actually, and the premise was, well, strategy games are fun, but that fun is rarely realized, so what can we do? And that's difficult. I don't know what the initial motivation was to create *Populous*, but it was probably born of that same theory. It's a very difficult thing to do.

NG: What about originality and sequels? Jeremy — Core is currently finishing *Tomb Raider II*, but it doesn't look like it'll be much different from the original ...
Jeremy Smith: The success of *Tomb Raider* means

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ng **special**

that people want more. *Tomb Raider II* is 50% again. The engine is 50% new, with dynamic lighting and outside areas. We felt that advancing the engine was justifiable. The problem now is the question of *Tomb Raider III*. We don't really know where else we can take it in its current form.

NG: But do you want to do it?
JS: Well, the demand is there. The consumers want it. If they didn't, then they wouldn't have bought three-and-a-half million copies of the game. The question is, where do you stop? We currently have a couple of guys beavering away on a product for a younger demographic. The market is there for seven- to 12-year-olds, but no one is addressing it other than Nintendo. You take that game to the board of directors, though, and they just look at you. But that market has to come.

NG: How would a board of directors react to a game like, say, *Grand Theft Auto* then?
David Jones: But that game was done out of passion. Every time we sit down and say we want to write something, we have to convince ourselves it's different. It was a hard slog to get publishers to accept that. The game also took a long time, and not that many people are willing to commit that length of time to a product. Originality takes time.

We can write something in 18 months, but personally I want another 18 months on top of that to make it original, to put all the stuff in that I want. You try getting anyone to approve a three-year time scale — most publishers would have a fit!
PM: Oh, don't say three years... [laughter all around]
DJ: We need time. Speak to most developers and publishers and they'll tell you 18 months is the average. I think it's terrible to force that on people. You can't just create a bigger team. In fact, you're better off with small teams — say, three or four

guys for three years.

NG: But doesn't that kind of extended time scale leave you open to technology issues? The PC market, for example, seems to be in constant flux at the moment. Who knows what graphics card you'll be writing to in three years' time?
DJ: That is a problem, and I'm personally looking forward to a bit more stability in technology so that we don't have to worry about that. We presented *GTA* two-and-a-half years ago, and we could've

done that game in 3D, but it wouldn't have been the same. In fact, I remember the publisher, halfway through the cycle, saying, "Could you switch that to 3D?" And we said, "No, because you can't just do that. It becomes something different."

NG: Is there a common denominator to be found in the way that games like *Command & Conquer*, *Populous*, or *Tomb Raider* are created? The "originality recipe"?
PM: The common denominator, I would guess, is passion. Everyone says, "Well, why aren't games better — why aren't there more really good games?" And I think that the answer is that what this industry doesn't do, amazingly, is play the games it makes. We create a game, we ask the teams to work all the hours God sends, and we don't give them time to play the game. That's really what makes the difference — sitting down and playing for hours and hours and hours. I know that happened with *Quake*, and I know that it happens with Japanese games, and it happens with my own games. Unless you've got the time to play it, you

can't figure out those little touches that make a game special. Like Brett said, you can look at established genres and see things people aren't looking at now, rather than writing down, "I'm going to do an original game today, and it's going to have these elements."

Laying the blame

NG: So where does the blame fall? Is it with producers, who actually frown upon people simply playing their games instead of coding them on a daily basis?

PM: I heard an interesting story the other day about that kind of thing. There was an American journalist, I think, who was questioning John Romero's role in the development of Quake, and he said that all John Romero did all day was play the coding and the graphics. What you do need is the guts and the tenacity and the willpower to turn something boring into something very interesting and motivating — and that takes a lot of willpower.

DB: The point about the passion thing is that you have to be creating the game for yourself, not for some imaginary market. It has to be something you would want to play. There's something about seeing everything planned out on a schedule for a game that really kills it. Schedules that say how many days you're going to work on this shape and how many days you're going to work on this effect — it stifles creativity. The way that we're trying to go is to develop the game to a showable state and

then talk to publishers and marketing people. Then you have the completion period, which is scheduled. But the problem I was trying to get at earlier is that it's very hard for a new developer to come in on the scene and produce something that can compete with things that have had a whole load of speculative development. Dave's helicopter game, for example. He has the luxury of time and money to kick that idea around for a while and see where it goes.

NG: Are developers restricted by technology as much as they are freed by it?

BS: It's very, very easy to be seduced by the technology and forget some of the fundamentals. We see it time and time again in our own studios. You always have a couple of programmers who think, "Hey, this is great — 3DFx, let's go for it!" You have to ask, "Is the game in here, or is this just self-indulgence?"

NG: Everyone seems to agree that the whole accelerator card explosion has helped the PC enormously, but if it has, then why are people still bemoaning the lack of gameplay?

PM: I think one reason is that the world is a very different place now, and what we're talking about here are original games. Larger companies aren't so good at that. The other reason is that it's easier to get away with flashy stuff. I don't know if there's any truth in this, but if you look back over the development cycle of games over the last 10 to 15 years, I reckon that about the same amount of time

is spent now on gameplay as was spent originally. Back in the days of the Commodore 64, to make a game special, you had to concentrate on the gameplay because the graphics were shit and the hardware wasn't up to much, so you really had to have gameplay for it to stand out. Now you don't have to do that. You can be much more lazy about it now that the 3D accelerators are around.

JS: But that technology just exposes crap games.

DB: I've seen a lot of games I think look very good but play very badly. I can name some if you want ...

JS: But so many bad games are just hyped with a great license and sell so many units, which is why this business can be so difficult to figure out. Look at the last FIFA game, for instance, released at Christmas. It's "granny money" that buys it — not the guy that reads magazines because the magazines said, "Don't buy it."

Sex and adult games

NG: Can the market be educated?

JS: I'm not sure they want educating. The trouble is that they want sex, they want Lara Croft on the front. They don't want wizards and thieves, and they don't want a helicopter because that's dull. As a developer, you get a thousand questions that say, "Well, what's the inspiration behind Lara Croft, and why are her tits so big?" Well, the game's great. Ignore her, and play the game. If you'd have put a guy in that game instead, it would still have been a great game. But would it have sold as many and been as popular with the media? No, probably not.

NG: So, do breasts sell games as well as newspapers now?

DP: We have a prostitute character in *Messiah*. It's the first game where you get to kill hookers. There have been girls in games for a long time, but Lara set the breast size to "large" and that changed everything. The technology is here to make a woman look like a woman — long hair versus short hair.

NG: Does the industry need to cater to what has supposedly become a more mature market and look more towards games that don't feature super-cute characters and flowers with smiley faces?

BS: I don't think that's a decision that guides a game's development. If an idea happens to target a younger audience, that's fine. If it's sound and entertaining, that's the important thing. I don't think we're consciously or overtly trying to make games that appeal to 18-year-olds or 25-year-olds per se.

DP: We're all getting older, though. As a group we're getting older, and that in itself is changing my attitudes as well. I'd find it very hard to do a real "cutesy" style game. Nowadays I look at things more seriously. I've played all the *Doom* games and various others. Violence has happened, sex has happened. The industry is definitely changing and that has changed us. In making the games we want to play, inevitably the games are becoming more twisted and weird than they used to be. I don't think it's a bad thing, but I think certainly those young seven- and eight-year-olds who are strolling into the marketplace have less choice than they used to have. There's not much in the way of *Mario* clones, but there's a lot of death and mayhem.

JS: There's not a lot of choice for the younger kids unless they go the Nintendo route. *Croc* is a good example. With the money Fox is spending on *Croc*, it will probably help to bring the demographic of PlayStation down. At the moment, the average age of PlayStation owners is 21, and they don't want to play "cutesy" games.

Videogames as toys

NG: Isn't the changing demographic more to do with the price of the system, which is now low enough to make it an affordable "toy" and available to younger gamers?

JS: Yes, it will get younger, but already we're moving on to the next thing. We're always chasing the hardware, aren't we? We're always moving on, and we're getting older.

DB: But that shouldn't matter. If you look at toy companies that make squeaky dolls, they're all business executives running the companies, but they still make toys that work for kids.

NG: You made the point earlier that you need passion to make a good game. Surely, the game you're making has to appeal to you, as a developer. So as you get older, maybe it's right that you make games with a conscious appeal to older gamers?

DB: I can see that, but I thoroughly enjoyed *Super Mario 64*.

NG: Has a game ever been successful because of its adult theme, or just despite of it?

DB: I think that *Super Mario 64* goes across the board.

PM: I don't think it matters a damn. I agree with what Jeremy was saying about Lara. She did help to sell the game, but if *Tomb Raider* had been crap, you probably would've gotten a bit excited, looked around for a while, and then moved on. I don't know if we need to pay more attention to content — maybe we should — but we really just produce games that we want to play.

DJ: It's actually a really good experience to have to go out of your way to design a game for another audience. When we started working with Nintendo, we'd always done games that we wanted to do in the Amiga and PC market.

NG: *Silicon Valley* is a pretty "cutesy" title ...

DJ: Yeah, *Silicon Valley* was targeted like that, and I found it so times the amount of work when Nintendo came back and said, "You're not thinking about the demographic — not thinking like a seven-year-old." It's so tough. Nintendo can do it, and it can be done, but you have to really try. If you're designing for Nintendo, and they're hammering it home every time they see you, then it becomes a job. We shouldn't kid ourselves. The whole thing about gameplay is that 'it is not easy, and it's not a natural thing. I can sit six programmers down and say, "Give me a car physics engine," and five of them will be complete crap. Now why is that? Why haven't they got it right? Why can't they get the feel right? I could shrink our company to ten people probably and have the best team in the world because I know the guys that really get it.

DP: The magical, kiddie world is all very well, but what the public actually wants is the violence. If you had *Mario Kart* and you could get Mario to fall out of his kart and you could run over him, then kids would be trying to do that all the time. That would be the best part of the game for them. Luckily, Nintendo said, "No, that's not going to happen." But the reality is that, as a gamer, I'd drive over Mario if I could.

PM: And reverse back over him ... [laughter all around]

DP: There you go! Peter's just taken it to the next level, right there. Whenever you create something like that, as we have in *MDK* with the sniper mode, if you give people the choice of shooting someone anywhere on their body versus the old games where they just throw a bullet out there and the thing dies, they really dig it. The only people who are going to stop that is us — by saying that we're not going to allow people to play this game to the level they'd like to.

BS: Why should we say that? The point is to give people the opportunity to do and see things and be in a world that is perhaps socially unacceptable.

That's very tempting. People love socially unacceptable behavior in their games. On one level, it might be morbid to go around shooting people in a game, but on another it's a release — a healthy thing. But, as entertainers and as people who create something that's fun, that will always be a rich and exciting area to explore. You have to decide whether or not you want to be socially responsible or even whether that enters into the art. For some of us who do it for the art, it's not a question of whether it's socially responsible. That doesn't really enter into the equation.

NG: Do you think it should?

BS: Maybe as realism becomes more and more attainable, that will become a real concern. But today, as realistic as they are, they still have a sort of cartoon aspect that you can't take too seriously. You do begin to glimpse the future, though, and there will come a time when we do brush up against that, and perhaps it will become a serious concern. But you could look at the example set by movies and books and see that there will always be those people who are successful who explore the taboo. Why did the VCR really catch on? Was it because people could watch pornography in their homes? Socially unacceptable behavior is something that human beings will always be attracted to.

JS: We get some pretty spooky letters about Lara from people who've bought the game. There are some strange people out there.

DP: We're calling our next game *Messiah*. You can imagine the letters that we're getting.

The key to interactivity

NG: Doesn't the reason games are violent have more to do with the fact that, in terms of art, we are so primitive that when we represent characters on screen, all we can really do is move them around 2D or 3D scenarios, but we can't let them have conversations? We're not advanced enough. Spacial logic, which is pretty much all we're capable of, inevitably leads to shooting and jumping.

DB: It may be that at the moment there are certain issues that haven't been addressed, and blamming things away is by far the easiest thing to program.

BS: Maybe people are inherently attracted to conflict and drama. That seems to be at the core: conflict and drama. A lot of people don't want to walk around a world and plant seeds. It's fun to see things blow up, and it's exciting to get into a jump jet and see it take off. It's an exciting moment, a thrill.

DB: What I prefer is the much more detailed, rich world where that's a factor and there are other ways around a problem. I like the sort of game that you can go back to and try different solutions to the same problem. As for Peter's point about reversing over Mario, it seems to me there are two

Socially unacceptable behavior is something that human beings will always be attracted to

Brett Sperry

ways that you could do it. You could have Mario with tire tracks over him — a cartoon-flat Mario that just pops back into shape — or you can have his intestines hanging out and blood spewing everywhere. I think the first is acceptable but not the second.

NG: Characterization is considered by the Japanese, who most agree make the best games, to be of paramount importance, but it seems to be something Western developers have trouble with.

PM: I think that the Japanese are very used to characterization. If you go to Japan you see that everything has a face on it. Even condom machines have little smiley faces. It's a lot easier for them because that characterization is really built into the society. Everything is made softer, more smiley, and nicer. Maybe that's why we're not quite so good at doing it. It's very tough to do. All the games I've seen that have tried to characterize themselves have all come back looking absolutely pathetic.

NG: Can Western designers get better at it? Is there something that must be learned?

JS: Every game we work on has a character. You want that character to exist and come through in the game — but 99% of the time, they don't. Once they do catch on, as Lara has, then the character becomes all-important. People are calling the game Lara Croft. It's *Tomb Raider*!

DJ: Do we have to pick up on it, though? It's like the whole American/European/Japanese game thing. I'm fed up with people saying to me, "Well, your game's nice, but it's not going to sell in America — you'll have to change it to appeal to the American audience."

PM: It's really tough. I don't think there's any English company that's ever really done it in America. *Dungeon Keeper* is number two at the moment in the States, and I think it's the highest charting game that EA has ever had. I'm very proud of this fact, I have to say ... [laughs]. America is such a tough market.

BS: Part of that is xenophobia. As part of my role at Virgin, I come over and try to make the European development teams realize the importance of courting the press. Why do our games not do well in Japan? It's not anything to do with us not creating the right games. It's because you're shut out of the market by the press.

PM: The Japanese press is just very hard to do. You can't just go to them and say, "Here you go, guys,

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here's a great game." You've got to get drunk with them, sing karaoke with them ...

DP: Getting back to the character thing. At Shiny we spend a lot of time developing characters. It's probably one of our core things that we do. The reality is that when you're designing the characters, most companies just chuck some "jumpy boy" into the game and they've got themselves a Croc or whatever, and the problem is that they then leave it there. Why didn't that become a TV show? Because you stopped. You made your game and you just stopped. We have guys at Shiny whose job it is to take care of the characters. They make pictures, sculptures, bibles, and attitude sheets, and they do all this crap that you need to do to fill out the character, and by extension, make it easy for a television studio to understand what you have. It's extra work, and it's insanely boring, but it's worth it. You don't want to think about what your character might say first thing in the morning, but you have to think about it and give them an attitude about everything in life. I mean, what's Lara Croft's bust size, Jeremy?

JS: She's perfectly formed, I can assure you [laughter]. Licenses to thrill?

NG: What about licenses? Is it possible to take a character from the outside world and make it a convincing game character? Looking at the people sitting here, famous for *Command & Conquer*, *Elite*, *Populous*, *Tomb Raider*, *Lemmings*, and *Earthworm Jim*, there's not a license amongst them, is there?

RS: Well, we've just finished *Blade Runner*, which is a big license. You get an opportunity to learn a lot more with a predesigned character and a predesigned world, and you learn a lot about the

subtleties. You learn so much when you have to live with the restrictions of a license about character modeling and about design. It's been a really good experience for us. It's helped us develop as artists.

NG: One of the major differences, it seems, between Japanese and U.S. and European game design, is that we produce a great deal of God games and first-person games, where you don't get to see any one "character." The Japanese don't seem to go for that.

DP: Games where you play inside the head of a character that you never see are really bad. It would be really hard to go and sell the lead character from *Doom* because nobody really knows what he looks

like — all you get to see is a hand. In *MDK*, we put the *MDK* character in front of you because we wanted you to see him getting hurt. But that's still not enough for toy companies because he is still facing away from you. So we had to turn him around now and again to give him some character.

NG: Does it matter, for the game experience, whether it's a game character you can relate to or not? *Elite* didn't have a character ...

DB: With something like *Elite* you're not really creating a character. You're presenting a world to the player and saying, "Go and have fun in it." A lot of games work fine like that. I think characters are going to become more important as time goes on. At the moment, the characterization that we're talking about is on a very shallow level. When we get two-way speech we're going to say, "Look at all this work we have to do to make this character convincing." We're going to need to know what Mario had for breakfast and whether or not he has a girlfriend.

PM: I agree with that. You've got to be able to converse, but by typing on a keyboard, you're never going to be able to converse with a character. I personally think that one of the greatest characters that's been created in recent times is the Tamagotchi egg — that's characterization for me. That's people actually associating with this little stupid thing. People cared about it, they loved it, they cried when it died. You can't get more relationship than that. One of the reasons it worked, obviously, is that you could fit it in your pocket, but there is still scope for creating characters that people care about. What we mustn't do is try to constantly re-create the characters that Hollywood creates for us. A character can be a whole game, like *Elite*. It didn't have a story, but then I built my own story in my head.

DP: I go to the Game Developer's Conference and 99 people out of a hundred in the room agree that games suck if they're not some kind of interactive story. I'm sitting there going, "But I'd rather make up the story. I'd rather someone was following me with the book, writing down everything I did, and that is the story."

DB: With some licenses it's really a tragedy that people are presented with a perfectly predesigned world that they could do a really good job with and they just fall completely flat. For example, *Shadows of the Empire* on N64. That was disappointing — the graphics were pretty but the game was lacking.

Artificial intelligence

NG: How long before AI will be strong enough for gamers to really have a hard time telling the difference between, say, an online player and a computer opponent?

DB: The Turing Test is defined as two people typing on a keyboard and for the person on the other end not to realize that it's a computer. But we're not asking just for that. We're asking for inflection and body language and for a face that's going to be convincing enough. If you imagine the sort of dialogues being spoken at the moment by what is basically a robot, the wider audience — the sort of people who routinely watch, I don't know, soap operas — would not give it the time of day. We're a long way from having a love interest in a game, and I don't mean a one-handed relationship.

JS: Well, you really ought to read some of the letters I get ...

NG: Peter, you said last year that AI was the future of gaming. Do you still think that?

PM: I think we've done a wonderful job of creating some beautiful environments, and it's time we started filling them with something other than just the empty space. It's one hell of a big task. It's what we've been talking about here — it is characters. If we try to reflect the real world too accurately, we're going to fall foul of our limitations until we can do something with those characters to make them really live. Yes, it's AI, yes it's allowing people the environments to play in. Back in the old days, in an adventure game, you'd go into a room and see all these objects that you wanted to touch but you couldn't, and we're really still there now. It's aggravating. We've got to start building characters and environments that change with the way we play. If I'm good at a game, it should make itself to me. One of the really aggravating things about computer games is that we still have "easy," "medium," and "hard" in there. How do people make those choices before they even start the game? We have the technology now, and with more effort, we should be able to balance the game ourselves, on the fly.

DB: At the moment, we're still defining a game

mostly by its graphics — i.e., 2D or 3D — and not by what the player does in the world. I think that the 3Dfx thing is almost a distraction because it's bringing the graphics back to the fore. We're at the point now where the 3D is fine, and the emphasis will shift to what you are doing within that 3D environment rather than the 3D itself. Is it exciting? How long does it involve you for?

PM: We could talk all evening about what we could put in a game to make it more real.

NG: What might those things be?

DP: One of the things we're doing in *Messiah* is having characters talk to each other, saying, "Hey, have you checked in there?" And you'd get the door open, and a guy would come in and look for you — and it would look as if they were searching for you instead of just waiting in a room for you to come in and shoot. Also, I might want to get at this guy hiding behind a pillar, so I could shoot his mate in the kneecap so that he starts screaming, and then the guy behind the pillar would try and drag him to safety, at which point, blam!

NG: Smoke and mirrors. Little tricks that help

> ## I think that the 3Dfx thing is almost a distraction because it's bringing the graphics back to the fore
>
> *David Braben*

convey reality.

DP: Right. You can make the gamer believe that there's a whole intelligent, complex sequence going on. For the moment, in our world, AI is still fake. It's going to get more convincing, but it's still going to be fake.

PM: It's always fake, in every game, and it always has been. AI is what people believe should happen. It's defined by us writing a script and saying, "Oh yeah, we'll do this and this" and so on. The real advances that need to be made are in the way that gamers communicate with a game. Until we free ourselves from the limitations of up, down, and fire, interaction with the world and the characters will remain fairly basic. Joypads haven't changed one iota since the first console. It's just crazy. Nintendo did something with that little nipple thing, but we need to go a lot further. A microphone would be cool.

DP: Yeah, a microphone would be a nice start.

DB: A microphone is still useful, even without speech recognition, because at least with multiplayer you can use it.

PM: I'd love all those things. Ah, sod it, let's just go directly neural connected ...

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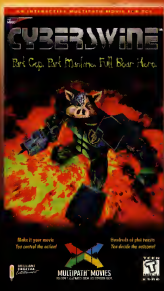
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Vigilance **PC** Shadow Man **PC, N64** Tellurian Defender **PC** Ehrgeiz **Arcade** 20,000 Leagues **PC** Metal Gear Solid **PlayStation** Aironauts **PC, PlayStation** 1080° Snowboarding **N64** Sanitarium **PC** Wartorn **PC**

alphas

Previews not for the weak

I f 1997 was the year of realtime strategy, let's be thankful it's over. Too many of the "same olds" can quickly make a genre mundane, and there were plenty of them. But what's next? In 1998, many third-person adventures will undoubtedly be revealed. This month, we bring you three unique prospects, *Shadow Man*, *Metal Gear Solid*, and *Vigilance*, as well as two revamped classics, *Legend* and *Lode Runner 2*.

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CD See the **Next Generation Disc** for more information when you see this symbol

The comic blends *Pulp Fiction* character types with voodoo plots in the vein of *Angel Heart*

Shadow
Man

Can another Acclaim comic become another Acclaim hit?

L ike Turok, Shadow Man is one of Acclaim's comic book properties. And like Turok before Turok: Dinosaur Hunter, chances are you've never heard of this title character. But all that may change now that he is poised to become the hero of his own game — a game that may turn as many heads as its comic-inspired brethren did on Nintendo 64.

"We created the engine," Iguana UK's Creative Director Guy Miller says, "and Acclaim said, 'Here are some comics — which one would you like to do?' There were about eight of them, but we picked out 'Shadow Man' immediately."

What the team found was the dark and complex story of a dead man named LeRoi, who travels between real life and a netherworld called Deadside, where he possesses the voodoo power of Shadow Man. Not only is LeRoi dead and in possession of superpowers in an alternate world, but he's also a professor of English literature and an assassin. You've got to see it to get it, and even then it's a long haul.

Assuming the role of Shadow Man the game plays from a third-person perspective, the player must stop a cadre of dead mass murderers who have formed a club in Deadside called the Asylum. The Asylum is attempting to open up gateways to the real world through which the armies of darkness can pour forth. Players pass from one world to the other during gameplay while being pursued by the murderers. Depending on

One look at the screen and players can immediately understand how Shadow Man's environments have an ominous flavor

which world the player is in, enemies take on various forms. Adding many dimensions to the plot and gameplay are the differences players will find when taking the guise of LeRoi versus Shadow Man.

"We've taken Seven, Silence of the Lamb, Jacob's Ladder, Millennium, all those things," says Iguana UK's Project Manager Simon Phipps, "and we've tried to take the coolest parts of those." Phipps adamantly claims that new 3D action/adventure engine will take that horror genre to the next level. "You can't make people laugh easily in games," he continues. "You certainly can't make them cry, but you can scare the shit out of them."

Already apparent are the advances that will set Shadow Man apart from today's

Format:	PC/Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Acclaim
Developer:	Iguana UK
Release Date:	Q3 1998
Origin:	U.K.

The inspiration for the Soul Gate (top). The project directors (above)

inhabited third-person cash-ins and sequels. For one, there's not so much "tunnel-warp." In both the real and the dead world, the player operates in open spaces and can pick out objects on the horizon and move towards them, entering the destination without delay. Even incidental characters display impressive AI.

Shadow Man's moves are also more sophisticated. "What we've done with this is give the character the complete ability to be ambidextrous and to carry any combination of objects in both hands," says Phipps. "The technology should not stop you from doing things you want to do." So instead of holstering a gun before rolling forward and producing a key, you can do it all in one move

Iguana UK began by creating the real-world elements of the game set in New Orleans before allowing itself the luxury of dreaming up the Deadside. "We've tried to make the real world behave as it should," says Phipps. "There are only so many situations in life when you have to find a switch and flick it to open a door elsewhere. It looks contrived, like a videogame. With Deadside, though, we can really go berserk with crazy stuff."

And even the location of Iguana UK — England's romantically crumbling industrial Northeast — has lent itself to the architecture of Deadside. The developer is housed in bright new buildings, but these

buildings sit on land that only a decade ago was synonymous in Europe with industrial decline. These days, the relics of 19th century British workshops, in the form of gorgeous, gigantic, rusting industrial lumps of scrap, litter the sides of newly laid Sim-City-style, service-driven developments. And it's exactly these uncomfortable chunks of U.K. industria that have sparked the imaginations of Shadow Man's creators.

"We've drawn on some local locations," Phipps explains. "We were struggling to find the look of the access points to the netherworld, called Soul Gates. We wanted a corrupt Cronenberg-esque mechanical nightmare. We wanted to get a look that whenever the player saw it, that overall shape would make them feel uncomfortable and uneasy."

Phipps explains that they were having no luck with this task when "three of us were driving past a demolition site, and we saw a monstrous, gigantic thing. And we all said, 'Oh look, it's the Soul Gate.' It's a shocking, memorable shape. You can see why it would have such an effect. It's the size of a house and shaped like the steel heart of some horrible creature. You don't know why it's upsetting. But it is. It makes you feel uneasy."

Apart from useless lumps of metal, Iguana has drawn on other worlds for inspiration. The artists spent a day crawling

These sketches suggest the range of earthly and other-worldly characters who form the opposition
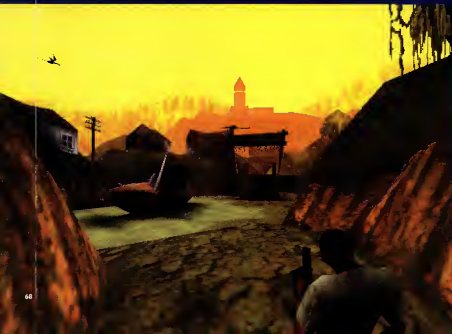
Currently building spacious Louisiana backwater exteriors (above), as well as detailed interiors (lower left), the *Shadow Man* programmers and designers are striving for the next level in realistic 3D game environments

through London's underground to perfect the look for the one section that actually does take place in tunnels. And Asylum headquarters is based on Breughal's Tower of Babel.

And then there's the influence of *Tomb Raider*. Both Phipps and Miller came to Iguana from Core and reveal that *Tomb Raider* was initially intended to present an evolving storyline. "It was something we originally spoke about at Core, and it's what *Tomb Raider* was originally going to be," explains Miller. "But the plotline could not be interwoven, so *Tomb Raider* progresses in a semilinear way. You get to the end and find the big guy, and that's it."

Shadow Man tries to do what *Tomb Raider* intended. "We want to take the backstory and put it into the game so you are exploring the story as you progress," says Miller. "It's woven into the game. What you usually get with games is this incredible two-page backstory, and then the game comes along and you just run around shooting stuff."

Ironically, the theme of the *Shadow Man* project resonates within the very walls of its destined publisher. Acclaim, a company desperately trying to shake its own deathly past of porn-quality, assembly-line, license-driven products, is in the midst of transitioning into a company that may effectively compete in an increasingly hit-driven industry — not unlike a man who travels back and forth between the world of the living and the world of the dead, tinkering with one in order to affect the other. And not unlike Ebenezer Scrooge

another man too familiar with ghosts), Acclaim seems to have survived a year-long night of Chapter 11 apparitions and now appears ready to make right with its developers.

"Acclaim has gotten behind us," says Miller, "and told us to make the very best game that we could. We are creating a real-life environment in which you can make choices. This is the sort of thing Chris Crawford has been talking about. We're moving towards the Holy Grail of gaming, and the technology allows our ideas to expand."

Plenty can happen before the game ships later this year, but let's hope the suits in Glen Cove, New York, let the team at Iguana UK do just that.

An accelerated P133 or a P166 without acceleration will run the PC version

LeRoi frequently travels between Deadside and the living world. But he can only enter the living world as Shadow Man at night

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Vigilance

Combining a cutting-edge engine, hot Internet technology, and the action/spy genre, SegaSoft has the odds-on *Goldeneye* killer for PC

The AnyWorld engine makes many lighting effects possible. Notice the red brake lights of the Hummer reflecting on the wall behind it (above)

Format:	PC/Online
Publisher:	SegaSoft
Developer:	Any Channel/PostLinear
Release Date:	Summer 1998
Origin:	U.S.

The game's covert tactics can lead to John Woo style stand-offs

SegaSoft's Nexus Group certainly has its hands full. Executive Producer Larry Pacey and his team are responsible for three of the company's big budget titles that will not only ship as single player games, but will also take exclusive advantage of *Heat*, the company's online gaming network. Among the games already to receive some recognition are *Skies* and *10⁶x*, but perhaps the one that may appeal to the most hard-core gamers is *Vigilance*. In co-development with PostLinear and engine builders Any Channel, the game is quickly taking shape. "We wanted to go beyond your basic shooter," says PostLinear game designer David Friedland, "and actually have appropriate characters, appropriate story, and

Character renders capture the style of the original sketches

background mission objectives."

Vigilance is based on a covert group of elite anti-terrorist personnel. Playable from the first- or third-person perspective, the game lets players choose from eight characters, all with their own attributes and characteristics. And each character design comes more or less from action film and spy thriller influences.

"We have our *La Femme Nikita* model, our *Face-Off* dark-suited federal agent, a kind of rowdy ex-marine, a hacker, a James Bond character, and a John Woo character," says Friedland.

Certainly these are appealing characters, yet wholly unoriginal. Pacey explains there's a reason for this.

"When you're jumping into an internet game," says Pacey, "especially an action-based game, you don't have a lot of time to say who you are. So you need to iconize that — you see the big, burly

The expansive environments put the action on many levels. In this warehouse level, security forces can be seen on three different floors. Taking a combative or covert approach with the guards is one of many choices players face

marine, and you know this guy has big guns and big armor. You see the suave guy or the action girl, and you can expect a style of play from them. You need to communicate that, have that right there in [players'] faces."

Before it becomes fully playable on the internet, the game will ship first as a mission-based, single-player game. "There are a lot of things to do," says Friedland of the missions, "ranging from demolition, hostage rescue, assassination, stealth missions, all sorts of things."

Friedland is also quick to point out that stealth plays a major role in the game. "There are places in the game," he continues, "where we intentionally made it too tough to fight your way through."

But players won't have to go it alone — there's an AI-controlled partner assisting players in each level. And if the right teammate is picked, completing the level may become a bit easier. Conversely, players will have to assist their teammate if they are in trouble. "We have what we call the three strikes and you're out clause," says Pacey, "which means [when] you get your third teammate killed, you get the bullet-in-the-back-of-the-head exit interview."

And like other developers who are just now turning away from the drab Quake-like levels, PostLinear is attempting to bring real-world environments to Vigilance. "We've tried to make levels that reflect what we call cinematic realism,"

Created in 3D Studio MAX and featuring a stunning radiosity lighting model, the moonlit, sunlit, or artificially lit environments look real

Unlike *Quake*, *Vigilence* puts the actual weapon in the hands of the character, with animations for each weapon

says Friedland, "which means real life, but real life as you'd like to feel when watching a *Die Hard* film."

To implement the real-world locations, PostLinear's lead artist on the project is an architect who oversees the modeling of areas like the airport, warehouse, and subway systems before passing them off to the gameplay designers. Also, to keep continuity, weapons will be based on mostly real-world guns.

"We've pretty much racked and exhausted the entire *Jane's Guide to Small Arms*," says Friedland, who admits they've stretched current technology in order to have some James Bond kind of weapons. "People on the team try and guess which weapons actually exist and which are made up," he says. "Sometimes the ones they think I made up actually exist. Like this 50-caliber, anti-tank pistol — someone actually went out there and made one."

On the subject of weapons, *Vigilance* is taking *Goldeneye*'s crosshair mechanism to the next level, as players will have a crosshair/floating cursor. This not only enables the player to interact with passive elements such as numeric keypads, but it also allows the player to target and shoot specific enemies while moving at the same time.

"We're trying to create a sense of teamwork and cooperation," says Pacey. "We could have teams battling each other, and for that you really need selective aiming." To demonstrate, Pacey paints a scenario in which an enemy and a teammate are both in a player's foreground. "In a traditional 3D game," Pacey says, "if they're both running by,

your rocket would most likely hit your teammates if he's the closer one."

Again as in *Goldeneye*, enemies take positional damage and reflect that damage not only in their animations, but in their actions. "If you shoot them in the arm," says Friedland, "they're gonna have a hard time hitting you. You shoot 'em in the head, your problems are probably solved." But, explains Friedland, the converse is true for the player. "If your arms really hurt," he professes, "you're gonna have a harder time aiming the cursor, and you're gonna be slower if your legs are hurt."

While SegaSoft has been working on *Vigilance* for some time now, *Next Generation* couldn't help but mention the game's likeness to *Goldeneye*.

This 3Dfx-enhanced test version can remarkably render the entire level
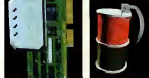
The game boasts more than one hundred high-tech weapons and gadgets, from traditional weaponry to special mini explosive devices

"We've had a blast playing *Goldeneye*," says Pacey, "and it's a validation of a style of play; the pacing of the game is more strategic, more stealthy, and you know, there's still action, but it's a thoughtful action. *Goldeneye* executed that wonderfully, but we take it ten times forward."

"And we jump," quips SegaSoft Associate Producer Phil Gelber.

SegaSoft's vision for *Vigilance* certainly is a grand one. With Transactor internet technology, the game will enable online players to own and purchase pieces of the game, the primary example being weapons. Called LEDOs, or Limited Edition Digital Objects, the game will continue to grow online as new weapons, characters, and levels are made available via Transactor. "This revenue model," says an enthused Pacey, "allows us to go in and pump out a lot of objects. It brings episodic growth to this product."

SegaSoft and the PostLinear team may be exacting sharp design and artwork for the game, but it's the *Any Channel* team, with its remarkable new AnyWorld engine, that may capture the scrutinous buyer's eye. While it has yet to undergo the test of gameplay, the AnyWorld engine could potentially outdo the magical engine created by id's John Carmack.

Probably deserving an article unto itself, the AnyWorld engine features realtime radiosity and luminosity lighting models, colored lightning, 16-bit color, all in software, running at 16 to 18 frames per second. With a hardware accelerator, players should experience a 24 plus frame rate, all on a P333. The plug-ins written by *Any Channel* enable PostLinear and SegaSoft designers to directly import their levels from 3D Studio MAX.

"Other game grade modelers might be more effective for building dungeons," says Any Channel Vice President of Technology Nate Huang. "You know, right angle tunnels and dungeons and that sort of geometry. But then it's sort of hopelessly outclassed by MAX when it comes to making more curved shapes and organic shapes. And I think you're gonna see a lot of those types of shapes in *Vigilance*."

Also, the speed with which the engine processes this information is enhanced by the company's specialized Binary Space Partitioning (BSP) trees. "That's sort of a standard way all first-person engines work today," says a soft-spoken Huang. "They break up space, they partition space into regions, and then with this tree of regions,

you can quickly determine the correct rendering order for all your geometry. We have very specialized BSP trees, which to my knowledge, our competitors don't have, which allow us to get some extra oomph behind the engine."

Currently, Any Channel is exploring the Voodoo2 chipset, and the team plans to exploit several of the other leading accelerator cards. "We want to be the ILM of interactive space," says Any Channel President Brian Yen. "Our goal is to bring movie-quality effects to interactive games."

Ambitious words, as Any Channel, PostLinear, and SegaSoft all have plenty of work ahead of them before the game is ready this summer. Considering the level of dedication each company brings to the project (Pacey only sleeps a few hours every night), it won't be luck if this title is even remotely as good as it appears it will be.

Character animations are more natural through a new segmented system

The design goal is to keep the screen free of as much interface as possible. Seamless cut scenes will feature the realtime characters

Metal Gear Solid

If you thought *Goldeneye* pioneered stealthy gameplay, think again. From the mind of the original designer of covert gameplay, the classic *Metal Gear* series resurfaces in grand style

Fantastic gunfire effects can be seen (above left) as Solid Snake attempts to dispatch two guards. Snow falls (above right) in some levels

The warehouse setting is elaborately built with polygons in realtime 3D

O f the many "great unplayables" at E3 last year, *Metal Gear Solid* topped the list. The videotaped game footage left many show attendees gawking in the aisle. But while a playable form of the game still has yet to make its way into the hands of **Next Generation**, the game is now certainly more than a looping video.

First previewed in the July '97 issue of **Next Generation**, *Metal Gear Solid* is the continuation of Konami's classic *Metal Gear* series, which began on the MSX-2 computer system ten years ago. This latest 3D incarnation of the action/adventure game takes place at the beginning of the 21st century. The U.S. nuclear weapon storehouse (dismantling station), located on an island off the Alaskan coast, has been sieged by Foxhound, a group of genetically enhanced terrorists. The player, in the role of ex-Foxhound member Solid Snake, must infiltrate the nuclear warehouse alone and avert the crisis — within 24 hours.

Hideo Kojima, Konami's producer and director, explains that the game will capture the flavor of his original *Metal Gear* game. "The game is based on the same principle," says Kojima. "You have to

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Konami
Developer:	Konami
Release Date:	Summer 1998
Origin:	Japan

avoid being discovered by the enemies. But everything is now in polygons. The player can jump from the overhead view to a view at the level of the character's eyes. With this feature different things become possible, like the use of a sniper rifle. It will be possible to zoom in on scenes 50 to 60 meters in the distance."

Essentially, *Metal Gear* engages the player to think strategically while never abandoning the pacing of action/adventure gameplay. At the beginning of the game, the unarmed and vastly outnumbered Snake must avoid contact with the enemy and efficiently use

9999

Taking full advantage of its powerful 3D engine, *Metal Gear* gives players a close look at the action (above) and also lets them look long range (lower)

CAMERA ANGLE = 400

FINDER

the warehouse environment to hide and move about undetected. If Snake is discovered, possibly by dogs and hidden cameras as well as humans, the enemy will sound the alarm, making things far more difficult. When players take the combat initiative, they will be required to kill the enemy covertly from behind, using either no weapons or a variety of firearms. When hidden, players can decide to engage enemies or let them pass, adding a unique level of intensity to the gameplay.

Ultimately, Snake will encounter his nemesis, Liquid Snake, and a strangely camouflaged cyborg ninja. These are just a few of the game's 20 characters, some of whom are Snake's support staff and can be reached by a comlink.

While the gameplay is sure to intrigue, *Metal Gear Solid's* technical prowess has already sparked debate as to whether the game has maxed out PlayStation's performance capabilities.

"We asked a lot of the PlayStation,"

says Kojima, debunking the myth, "but according to the programmer, there is still a little bit more we can use."

And indeed, the group certainly has done its homework on the system. Design work on the title began as early as 1994, and the main programmer began solely coding the project in 1995. Between that time and September of 1996, Konami slowly ramped up to a full-blown production team, with a current staff count of 25. The code for the game is completely written in C, not Assembly, and interestingly, it is the first polygonal game designed by Kojima or programmed by his team.

"It was our first time," Kojima admits. "We had to make some models, make them move, and manage the light. We were worried about it at the beginning."

Since the game promises to be the most detailed of the fully 3D PlayStation games due out this year, they are not worried anymore   ng

? LIFE

Shades of the original, as players must avoid the guards from this top-down view (above) and risk detection when the "?" appears (top)

77

1080° Snowboarding

The surprise hit of Nintendo's Space World show offers both real-world snowboard simulation and arcade thrills aplenty

Nintendo still goes that little bit extra to add realistic effects — notice the trail the boarder's dragging hand leaves in the snow (above)

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	Nintendo
Release Date:	February 1998
Origin:	Japan

O f the four "Miyamoto" games unveiled at Nintendo's Space World show, held in Tokyo last November, 1080° Snowboarding was the surprise hit. The Legend of Zelda, Yoshi's Story, and F-Zero X should all be superb Nintendo 64 titles, but they come from pedigree 8-bit and 16-bit lineages. 1080° Snowboarding is a brand new franchise, and it's one that looks likely to equal the sophistication and popularity of WaveRace 64.

At the heart of 1080° Snowboarding's success are outstanding graphics and solid control. The visuals are simply wonderful, complete with lens flare, as boarders carve directly into the evening sun, spraying icy powder as the edges of the board cut hard into the slope. Indeed, the game's look manages to keep the best of Japanese style and clarity, yet lose the childish cute of many Nintendo games. In terms of style and appeal, it's reminiscent of a Sega arcade title. The sensation of speed remains top-notch throughout, and there's no sign of slow-down in the split-screen, two-player mode (four-player isn't possible for this first version — look for it in the sequel).

Of course, it's no surprise that the 64-bit graphics give the game an edge over 16-bit and 32-bit titles. But it's the analog control that makes the real

Unlike Lamborghini 64 or Extreme G, 1080° will be limited to two players

Catching big air adds a bit of arcade action to what is otherwise a simulation-based game. 1080° also boasts nice realtime shadows

5'54"76 TIME

Jx2

As in *WaveRace*, the tracks will feature different lighting models based on cloud conditions and time of day

difference. As any real-world shredder will tell you, snowboarding is all about "feel" and "touch" — and conventional eight-way joypads have never been up to the job of delivering these subtleties. But Nintendo 64's pad is, and when coupled with a game engine based on real-world physics and a board model complete with multiple friction edges, the result is a game that not only already looks better than any snowboarding game before it, but also seems destined to play better.

Although set for release in Japan in February, at press time the final specifications of the game features weren't complete. What is known is that there will be a training mode, a half pipe in which to practice stunts, "six or seven" courses, and "seven or eight" characters. As per the usual videogame formula, different characters will feature different trade-offs between speed, cornering, and weight, and so on. Obviously, the primary aim is to get down the hill faster than the competitors. But players can also earn bonus points for pulling off stunts — often the result of taking the most difficult route down the mountain. The different courses offer varying degrees of challenge, with some geared towards high-speed downhill runs and some towards trick-and-jump showboating.

The team behind *1080° Snowboarding* started work just last April, so it can be credited with achieving fantastic results in a very

short period of time. With a slew of Nintendo 64 snowboarding titles headed for release (there's *Snowbow Kids* from Atlus, *Twisted Edge Snowboarding* from Boss Studios, and *Snow Speeder* from Imagineer, to name just three), Nintendo's own offering has to be considered the favorite to come out on top. *1080° Snowboarding* should do for the sport (and Nintendo's competitors) what *WaveRace* did for the jet ski genre. The only question is whether anyone's really surprised ...

The course number is not yet finalized, but six or seven are expected

Tricks are still being worked out, but this standard grab is already in

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ng alphas

An interview with
Giles Goddard

Although developed at the Japanese headquarters of Nintendo Corporate Limited (NCL) in Kyoto, at the center of the 1080° *Snowboarding* team is actually a pair of English programmers, Giles Goddard and Colin Reed. **Next Generation** met with Giles Goddard on the Space World show floor to talk about the project.

NG: How long have you been working on 1080° *Snowboarding*?
GG: We started work in April or May of 1997.

NG: So this is only nine months' work? That's incredible ...
GG: We're very fast workers (smiles).

NG: Where's the game being developed?
GG: We're working out of NCL's headquarters in Kyoto, Japan.

NG: Who's on the team?
GG: It's a mish-mash really. There are two programmers, myself and Colin Reed, and we both worked on *Wild Trax* for Argonaut. I also worked on *StarFox*. We have a designer who worked on the *WaveRace* project and our director is from Namco, where he worked on *Tekken 2*. Shigeru Miyamoto is the producer.

NG: When is the game scheduled for completion?
GG: Our deadline is February of 1998, and we'll definitely make it on time. As of today, all we have to do is put in three more characters and add some more maps, and then we're done.

NG: Everyone's very impressed with the way it looks. Can you tell us a little about what's going on under the hood?
GG: The 3D engine is, of course, the original N64 engine, but then we're doing various tricks. For example, the characters are "skinned" so there are no joints between the polygons. Also, all the character animations are interpolations between animation and inverse kinematics. So basically, when your character hits something in the game, his body is modified according to what you hit, from what direction, and at what speed.

NG: Are you using any motion-captured animation at all?

GG: At the moment, there's no motion capture in it, no. But the motion is really smooth because we interpolate between frames and we have the inverse kinematics in there so it has that motion capture feel.

NG: To what extent is it an accurate snowboarding simulation? Are the tricks in the game based on real snowboarding tricks, and to what extent is the interaction between the snowboard and the course terrain based on real-world physics?

At Space World, 1080° *Snowboarding* caught the eye of many

We're trying to make it as real as possible, as opposed to going for the classic, cute, Nintendo look

GG: As far as the tricks are concerned, the animation needs quite a bit of tweaking — the tricks are a bit dodgy at the moment. But as for the board dynamics, we basically modeled a real board with all the edge friction and underside friction and so on. So, yes, the game does all of the applications to replicate the real physics of a real board. So when you're skating down in the game and, say, catch the edge of your board down a tree trunk, the game handles all of the calculations in real time — it's not using any hardwired solutions or anything like that.

NG: To what extent have you sacrificed simulation accuracy for arcade thrills and gameplay?
GG: Only a little. It definitely comes down on the simulation side of the fence. But having said that, there are certainly a lot of little fudges in there that make it more of an enjoyable arcade-style experience.

NG: What features will be in the final version?
GG: There will be six or seven courses, plus a training course and a half pipe. There will also be seven or eight characters and a two-player mode.

NG: What do you make of the other snowboarding games in development for N64? Are you worried at all?
GG: Um, I can't really talk about that. Let's just say that we haven't seen too much competition. We're not sweating too much.

NG: Do you snowboard yourself?
GG: I'm a snowboarder, and a couple of the artists are snowboarders, and what we're most enthusiastic about is the "feel" of the game. We know that this is what we've got to get right and that this is the most important thing. We're trying to make it as real as possible, as opposed to going for the classic, cute, Nintendo look. You can even tell by the music that this isn't your average Nintendo game

NG: How did you get started at Nintendo? And how difficult is it for a Western game programmer to be accepted in Japan?
GG: The first time I went to Nintendo I was working for Argonaut on *StarFox*. As for being accepted by Nintendo, it takes a ton of luck, I suppose. Certainly, they don't go around freely employing *Gaijin* [Japanese slang for Westerners] programmers or indeed, any other programmers not straight out of Japanese universities. But it's a matter of being at the right place at the right time and getting a reputation for yourself. Then, once they trust you, you're in. And from that point on, they'll continue to look after you, no matter the quality of what you produce. It's a Japanese thing.

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–Next Generation

Ehrgeiz

After testing the waters with *Tobal*, Square's Dream Factory is back, this time with a System 12-powered fighting game

The fighting genre is screaming out for an injection of fresh ideas. While *Ehrgeiz* borrows a few concepts, it intends to offer just that

Format:	**Arcade**
Publisher:	**Namco**
Developer:	**Dream Factory**
Release Date:	**Q1 1998**
Origin:	**Japan**

As in all good fighting games, *Ehrgeiz* will boast its fair share of gravity-defying throws and hit 'em-while-they're-down tactics

S quaresoft's *Tobal* series baffled fighting game traditionalists with its grapple-based combat, although many gamers still found it hard to associate the RPG maestros with a fighting game. This might still be true if not for Mr. Ishii, a lead programmer at *Tobal* developer Dream Factory, who originally worked on the *Tekken* games. In an ironic twist, his latest creation is to be released in the arcades by Namco, his former employer, on the PlayStation-friendly System 12 board.

Following the precedent set by Konami's *Fighting Wu-Shu*, *Ehrgeiz* has (for now) only four playable characters. As in the *Tobal* games, much emphasis has been placed on offbeat and diverse gameplay elements; action can occur at either close or long range through the use of grappling moves or projectiles. Players will also be able to use a special escape button at certain points in order to break out of prolonged struggles. Provided these elements are carefully balanced so as not to favor one style of play, *Ehrgeiz* should offer considerably more variety than its contemporaries.

Ehrgeiz also pushes the fighting game envelope by splitting the "ring" into two floors. First seen in the PlayStation title *Bushido Blade*, this concept has enormous potential for advancing the fighting game

genre and is one that **Next Generation** would like to see explored further. Bearing this in mind, Dream Factory's experimentation with varying distances in combat begins to make a lot of sense.

The unfortunate result of distancing the action is that it becomes less intense, a problem Ishii and his team have addressed. As a result, players can now employ background objects as weapons — for instance, they can climb on top of crates to attack from above or simply shove the crates at other combatants.

With *Tekken 3* still popular in arcades, *Ehrgeiz*'s shared heritage should garner it some attention regardless of any gameplay innovations. Sure enough, it mimics the strong characterization, striking design, and fluid animation of its cousin. If it can bask in even a little of the glory of the *Tekken* franchise, *Ehrgeiz* is assured success.

Ehrgeiz adds projectiles to the otherwise *Tekken*-like gameplay style

Aironauts

Not out trainspotting, Scotland's Red Lemon Studios makes its debut with innovative, high-flying, arena-based combat

Format:	**PC/PlayStation**
Publisher:	**TBA**
Developer:	**Red Lemon Studios**
Release Date:	**TBA**
Origin:	**Scotland**

Points are awarded for executing aerial stunts as well as gunning down rivals. The spacious, complex levels are designed in 3D Studio MAX

The first title out of Scotland's Red Lemon Studios, *Aironauts* could be described as the PlayStation answer to *PilotWings* — but thankfully, with guns.

The story is not unlike the plot of the Schwarzenegger film, *The Running Man*. In the future, prisons are at full capacity and unable to cope with the convicted elements of a violent society. A popular TV show called "Aironauts" pits eight selected criminals in a battle against each other as they fly above the world's toughest containment facilities in an attempt to win their freedom.

"We've tried to present a coherent design strategy all the way through, from level design right through to the look of the characters," explains Lead Artist Michael Kane, "keeping in mind that our main goal is to produce an arcade game and therefore not make it too fancy so that the front end allows you to get into the game really easily and quickly."

Inspiration for *Aironauts* sprang from the bitter disappointment of playing countless flight sims that promised exciting dogfighting action, yet delivered a lackluster experience at best. The emphasis is therefore on action, with players attempting to outscore their competitors either by shooting them down, performing stunts and combos, or completing mini missions. Meanwhile, players must make sure they are not taken out by other psychopaths in the arena.

Aware that one of the best aspects

Red Lemon's three directors (from left) Andy Campbell, Laurent Noël, and Andy Findlay talk shop. The Aironauts characters (right) and backgrounds were influenced by the recent "Batman" comics

of first-person shooters is the multiplayer option, Red Lemon Studios has included a link-up facility for PlayStation, as well as split-screen and network options on the PC. Single players, however, have not been forgotten.

"We've jazzed up the environments," Co-director Andy Campbell says. "We've included bonuses, power-ups, and ultra hoops. So while you're flying about, you might think, 'I can get a few extra thousand points by doing a double loop corkscrew through these things here,' but if you go for it, you must accept the risk that someone else will shoot you down."

The fully Gouraud-shaded environments are made up of 15,000 polygons, encompassing eight characters with a 800 polygon count each. However, the most visually arresting element is the absence of fogging, which affords players an extraordinary field of view and provokes a sense of depth rarely experienced in videogames — especially if the player flies up to the "ceiling." According to Jean-Paul Cossigny, lead programmer for the PlayStation version, the 3D environment was the most difficult aspect to implement. "Some of these polygons are huge," says Cossigny, "and get more complex as you get closer, and there's virtually no distortion."

PC Lead Programmer and Co-director Laurent Noël claims to be uninterested in polygon counts, explaining that 3D accelerator cards are making it easy. Instead he's focused on the demanding AI. "We've got to maneuver these computer characters around in a fully three-dimensional environment," says

Sure enough, the console version will feature split-screen battles (top)
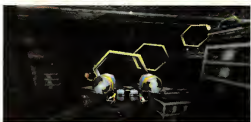
Players looking down from the "ceiling" of the world get a sense of its depth

Noël. "You've got to have something that works as if players are fighting against humans. If the computer always reacts in the same way to certain stimuli, the player will soon get bored."

The three Red Lemon co-founders are longtime veterans of Gremlin Studios and now have a staff of 14, two publishing deals, and a strong arena-based combat game in the making. "We want to see the Red Lemon logo on the box as a brand of quality entertainment," says co-founder Andy Findlay. "When people see it, they will be assured that it's going to be a good game to play. We want to follow in the footsteps of developers like Bullfrog and Westwood, then take it further — that's where we're headed."

Both versions will feature translucency effects. Large buildings in this level provide cover and offer opportunities to ambush opponents

Tellurian Defender

Psygnosis' ambitious new PC title blurs the line between action and strategy games

Designed specifically to take advantage of 3D accelerator cards, *Tellurian Defender* should build upon Psygnosis' graphics legacy

As PC games become more sophisticated, the distinction between genres becomes more and more difficult to discern. For instance, action titles feature elements that expand beyond traditional arcade-style gameplay while strategy games are including more and more action elements.

apocalypse caused by a storm of meteorites. Despite an almost decimated population and widespread devastation, the human race has persevered only to face an invasion from an alien race named the Greys. As the game progresses, the player learns that this group is in a rather convenient

The real star looks to be the massive environments

Psygnosis hopes to imbue the game with an awe-inspiring sense of scale

Psygnosis' latest project is a prime example of this genre convergence. By first impressions, *Tellurian Defender* appears to be a 3D arcade shooter much in the vein of console titles like *StarFox 64*. Although it features a fully realized 3D landscape that allows the player free reign to explore, the game appears to have much in common with *StarFox's* low altitude flight combat play. On top of that, *Tellurian Defender* features quite an impressive array of strategic elements that promise to provide more depth than the standard action/shooter.

Featuring a script written by Morgan Gendel (of "Star Trek: The Next Generation" and "Deep Space Nine" fame), *Tellurian Defender* is set in the early 21st century, where the Earth is recovering from a near-environmental

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Psygnosis
Developer:	Psygnosis
Release Date:	Q1 1998
Origin:	U.K.

In spite of its resource management and mission-based gameplay, *Tellurian Defender* remains a shooter at its core

alliance with an even more powerful alien race called the Yatz, whereby the Greys harvest human bodies for biological mechanisms to implant in their own deteriorating bodies before trading the human bodies to the Yatz for food. The Yatz, in turn, use the bodies for sacrificial purposes. As is often the case in games, the nefarious alien threat is countered by a small squadron of fighters from the Earth Defense Organization (EDO).

But the real star in *Tellurian Defender* looks to be the massive environments. Each level features more than 16,000 square kilometers filled with diverse landscapes like forests, deserts, jungles, water, and snow-covered terrain. Realistic weather conditions, including blizzards, electrical storms, and tornadoes, add atmosphere and provide more challenges for the player. As Garvan Corbett, lead artist for the game, puts it, "The challenge of building 3D models to scale to convey the vastness of the landscapes has been enormous, but I think we've come up with some pretty cool stuff that looks superb and really makes the players feel like they are in a realistic environment."

First impressions indicate *StarFox*-like gameplay, but unrestricted 3D environments and diverse missions promise much more

Allocating resources for R&D is important as scavenging during missions when upgrading a Fighter

With more than 20 types of drones, scouts, and fighters in each level, as well as ground vehicles, mother ships, and what Psygnosis refers to as massive "grandmother" ships, *Tellurian Defender* should set the standard for the burgeoning genre. Although the overall storyline is linear, the 30 plus missions that lead players through the story are structured such that there is never just one way to achieve an objective. And depending on how players perform on the missions, the game adjusts the difficulty level. Strategy game elements like resource management and utilization play an important role in the game, as the player must retrieve, deploy, and allocate weapons and wingmen according to availability and mission requirements. This will work well with the multiplayer aspect, as the game will support up to eight players (possibly 16) over LAN, with two-player, head-to-head games available by modem.

"From a gameplay perspective we wanted to immerse the player in a complete, real universe, where your actions actually have a meaning," says Lead Designer Paul Hilton. And that's really the goal of *Tellurian Defender*: to create a dynamic atmosphere where the player will be faced with constantly transforming challenges. If all the elements fall into place, the game should live up to Psygnosis' reputation for superior graphics and unique gameplay.

Stylistically, *TD* pays tribute to the classic alien invasion scenario

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Legend

Can an old 2D Super NES beat-'em-up make the leap to a better, faster, 3D PlayStation beat-'em-up?

For optimal viewing pleasure, the camera gets close during close combat

It helps to have a weapon, in this case an axe, for a meeting with a boss

W hether or not you believe videogames have broken out of their infancy, the fact is, truly original game ideas are few and far between. So why not follow the current Nintendo model? Take an older title with an established style of gameplay in this case the beat-'em-up genre, and give it the technology polish it deserves.

Sensing a lack of good fighting adventures on PlayStation, Funsoft intends to do just that with *Legend*. The game is loosely based on the Super NES title of the same name, which was released in 1992. For those who don't remember that game, it was a 2D side-

Format:	**PlayStation**
Publisher:	**TBA**
Developer:	**Toka/Funsoft**
Release Date:	**April 1998**
Origin:	**France**

scrolling brawler of the *Final Fight* variety with the medieval fantasy flavor of the *Golden Axe* series.

Now in 3D, *Legend* enables players to become either Axel or Tara and undertake a 20-level quest to save the kidnapped king. As tradition has it, players move from left to right on a 3D path, beating up every

polygonal object that moves. Enemies are of the standard variety — thugs, thieves, soldiers, skeletons, etc. — with bosses appearing every four or five levels.

In the early demo **Next Generation** received, *Legend*'s environments were certainly more confining than those of *Fighting Force*, but even in this early version, the action seemed faster and the character models much larger. While the camera was far from exact, the speed and balance of the gameplay felt as good as you remember the best 2D brawlers — refreshing news at a time when many games attempting to process 3D space only throw off the entire gameplay mechanic. Let's hope Funsoft can keep this one on track

Enemies will surround you in traditional beat-'em-up style

Sanitarium

While others try to reinvent the graphic adventure, DreamForge and ASC try to breathe new life into an old form

The entire game is seen from the main character's somewhat shaky mental viewpoint — the dreary and often crumbling backgrounds mirror his uncertain grip on reality

The point of the game is to "freak you out" — as if we couldn't guess that

Format:	PC
Publisher:	ASC
Developer:	DreamForge Intertainment
Release Date:	Q2 1998
Origin:	U.S.
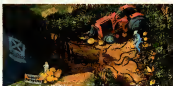
It could be argued that the graphic adventure is perhaps the most technologically stagnant genre in computer gaming. A quick glance at hundreds of titles in the last five years quickly shows they haven't changed much since the invention of the point-and-click interface. However, it's a form that developer DreamForge knows well, having been the creative force behind *Menzoberranzan*, the recent *War Wind*, and the *Ravenloft* series.

On a technical level, the developer's latest title *Sanitarium* won't stretch the genre's gaming mechanics at all — it's still the same old point-and-click. Yet its subject matter, storyline and approach are as far from the elf-laden fantasy that typifies the genre as one could possibly imagine, proving that if you've got a compelling story to tell, the graphic adventure is a good way to tell it.

Travis Williams, executive producer for ASC, is up front about the designers' intentions from the start. "The whole point of this game is to freak you out," he says matter-of-factly, "and it's actually the first one I've ever come across that really does it. And that's why I said, 'God, we've got to pick this one up.' I haven't really been

creeped out playing an adventure game since, well, almost never. *D*, maybe *Darkseed* had their moments, but that's it."

Perhaps taking a cue from the venerable early '80s text adventure *Asylum*, in which the players' only means to escape the titular mental institution was to believe in their own insanity enough to build an invisible catapult and be thrown over the wall, *Sanitarium* depicts an acute nervous breakdown from the inside out. The protagonist, a research scientist who has developed a cure for a world-threatening disease, runs his car over a cliff in the game's opening cut scene. Awakening in a nightmarish institution, he not only has forgotten his own name, but swathed in bandages from the accident, has no face either. The extent of his neurosis becomes quickly apparent as fearsome hallucinations blend with what passes for reality, and much of the game's challenge lies in deciphering the clues left by the manifestations of his

Sanitarium's puzzles aren't meant to needlessly impede the player's progress — the designers have a story to tell

This may turn out to be one of the few games that is genuinely disturbing without resorting to the simple gross-out

own guilt-ridden subconscious.

"Everything you see is pretty much classical plot devices," Williams says. "You get flashbacks in video, you get foreshadowing. You find out who you are pretty quick that way, as your subconscious mind gives you clues. I wanted to get away from certain things that are cliche. It seems like every damn adventure game starts off and you don't know who you are, but we wanted to give you enough story and weird bits all the time that it's actually a pleasure to keep going."

The game uses 100% prerendered backgrounds that scroll smoothly as the player moves, along with, in all probability, the latest TrueVision 16-bit video. The production design and music are effectively creepy, with short video segments containing a number of macabre shocks. "Still," Williams insists, "we try to give you classic things, like a more gothic horror than bloody horror. If someone dies you'll see shadows, hear screams, maybe you'll see some blood splatter, but as for graphically depicting it, we leave that up to the individual's mind because it's always scarier when you just imagine what's going

on." Nevertheless, much of Sanitarium's imagery is genuinely disturbing — barely a level into the game, the player is confronted with a village populated exclusively by deformed children.

However, within its own twisted framework, this is a game that's meant to be played and enjoyed. "We've tried to keep the puzzles from being too obtuse," Williams explains. "It's not something you're going to have to buy a hint book for because I hate that. Like I was playing Riven, and I just went and bought the hint book — I figured I might as well just get that out of the way — and I'm looking through it and it says, 'Riven's numerical system is base five,' or some crazy shit like that, and I just go, 'What the hell? Ah, that's crazy!' We definitely just wanted to give you enough game. It's going to be three CDs long, but we don't have to make it pointlessly hard to keep you playing for 30 or 40 hours."

From what we can see, those 30 or 40 hours are probably best taken in small doses. Even at this stage, it seems probable that overexposure to Sanitarium might very well put a stain on one's own sanity.

And we mean that in a good way. ng
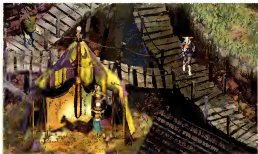
Sanitarium marks one of the few times insanity has been depicted in an interactive medium — hold on to your mental stability and you win

20,000 Leagues
The Adventure Continues

What, a game with FMV that might actually be good? No, **Next Generation** hasn't lost its mind

The game mixes pristine high tech with aged Victorian-era gadgetry — an eclectic mix that stands out

Format:	**PC**
Publisher:	**SouthPeak Interactive**
Developer:	**SouthPeak Interactive**
Release Date:	**Q3 1998**
Origin:	**U.S.**

Video Reality Studio tracks camera moves and scripts in game elements

FMV is normally one of those things that makes the staff of **Next Generation** roll its eyes and groan, and with good reason. Too many "interactive movies" over the last four years have been crushingly linear, badly acted, and above all, dull as dirt. And, not surprisingly, most of the FMV players (Digital Pictures, Any River) have folded. However, one company is still committed to FMV as a viable form and may have hit on the mechanism to do it right. SouthPeak Interactive is the gaming division of software giant SAS, which produces mostly information processing tools, industrial and corporate training software, and edutainment. As part of the latter, it developed a process called Video Reality, a way of using video as the basis for building navigable, interactive environments.

"It was disheartening because FMV did get such a bad rap," says Jason Pace, manager of SouthPeak's Video Reality Studio, "but we stuck with what we believed in — that real-world images are inherently beautiful and inherently interesting, and if you can put interactivity into those pictures, then it would be a worthwhile venture." Video Reality uses video as a backdrop and lets the designers layer graphics and "objects" on top, all the while allowing players to navigate by using clicks of the mouse. The first game to use the technology, *Temujin* (reviewed this issue), was a mixed bag — technologically impressive, but the storyline was far from compelling, and it did little to raise itself above any other point-and-click adventure.

20,000 Leagues: The Adventure Continues will be the third title to use the process. The second is the soon-to-be released *Dark Side of the Moon*, which

uses prerendered backgrounds. 20,000 Leagues uses a combination of prerendered backgrounds and live sets and should benefit from SouthPeak's experience, both technologically and creatively. "One of the things that was kind of surprising," Pace explains, "is that while we're really keen on pushing the interactivity, or at least the responsiveness, as one of the key defining elements of user experience, initially we found that we overachieved — it was so responsive people got lost, they couldn't drive it at all. So we said, 'Well we've got to back off a little bit, tone this thing down, make a more click-driven type of interface,' since that seemed best based on the usability studies that we did."

The storyline begins about 20 years in the future. The player, as Will Stewart, a marine biologist, is exploring the possibility of farming the ocean floor when he discovers the Nautilus, lost on a coral reef at the bottom of the ocean. When his research vessel is mysteriously destroyed a short time later, he and his companions are forced to flee in the Victorian-era submarine, pursued by various forces across the globe on an adventure that takes them from Fiji to Atlantis to the South Pole.

Lee Sheldon, senior writer and designer, explains his approach to

building interactive stories and conversations. "My background has two structured writing components to it. One is plays, which are very structured, and the other is mysteries, which also have a definite structure, and those two things give me a really good framework. The fact that I've been a gamer for 20 years means I understand you can't just go from A to B to C. On the other hand, I also hate those branching interactive movies. I think there are some legitimate uses for branches. I use them in some conversations, but now I structure them more like webs, where they keep turning back on themselves. I kind of think nonlinearly. I think of plot moves as building blocks that you can lay out in any order and still keep interesting."

His enthusiasm showing, Sheldon continues. "This is all smoke and mirrors, the interactivity. I'm not into AI and trying to get the computer to do all the work. I think I can fake people out enough. What I like to do is start out with a beginning and let the player go wild — you can go in any direction. It appears to be random, but it ain't.

"If you set your initial conditions correctly, I discovered there is no longer a golden path. Here's an example: the bad day at the office. Let's say six different negative things can happen at the office — your email got trashed, you had a bad disagreement in a meeting, whatever, but there are six of them, and they can happen in any order. Well, you go home after just one of them has happened, and your significant other asks, 'How was your day?' You say 'Oh, not bad.' If three of them happen, 'Oh, not too good.' If all six happen, 'I had a bad day!' And that's a case of how a story has been built, and there's been tension created, there's been some suspense created, but the events can happen in any order, and it's not that difficult to translate into a story, as long as you're careful about the initial conditions."

With a handle on both the technology and the underlying story, the company appears to have 20,000 Leagues on the right track, and with its huge corporate backing, SouthPeak can afford to continue experimenting. "The traditional problem with video is that you can't change the picture," Pace concludes. "We can change the picture. We're actually working now on some morphing techniques that would let us even get to points where we didn't originally capture — although that's still very experimental."

With locales from Fiji to the South Pole, the graphics are excellent — let's hope the story and pacing match the visuals

The production design is ambitious, to say the least, but with banks of SG workstations and the resources of SAS, it can be done

At this point, all it needs are a few actors to fill the stage

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Lode Runner 2

Another classic 2D game gets a 3D makeover
— but is the gameplay still attractive?
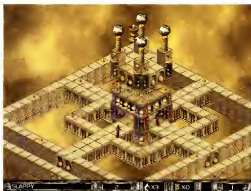
Format:	PC/Macintosh
Publisher:	GT Interactive
Developer:	Presage
Release Date:	June 1998
Origin:	U.S.

Anyone who has seen the original Apple II *Lode Runner* understands how it only takes a quick look at the screen to get a sense of the impending adventure. The player must navigate an approximately 10-pixel-high character up and down ladders and across a large level sprawled across one static screen. Collecting the gold bars and avoiding the mad monks (before exiting the level) was almost like playing a hopped-up action version of Psygnosis' classic *Lemmings*.

So more than ten years later, how does *Presage* plan to bring the game to 3D? "We had this idea to take it into an isometric perspective," says Presage Executive Producer Scott Matthews, comparing the camera to those of *Diablo* and *Crusader*. "But *Crusader* sits on one big flat plane. We wanted to do vertical action as well; we wanted to put them into the z plane."

So instead of going the *Tomb Raider* route or trying to build large characters that move on scrolling terrain, the team has boldly opted to keep as much of the game on the screen at once. "Even though it was really cool to have that nice big world," says Mathews of the original plan, "we were playing it, and we were going through it, and we're like, 'Where the hell's the bad guy?' and 'Where's the gold?' So we reduced the volumes by more than 50%."

Mathews explains that one of the greatest challenges has been keeping the *Lode Runner* gameplay, but he assures **Next Generation** that there will be plenty of 1998 enhancements. "We're gonna have multiplayer gameplay, obviously," he says. "We've got some ideas about actually taking some concepts out of *Bomberman* and doing

Lode Runner 2 **will feature a ballpark 75 levels, built with tile sets that include the traditional (above), futuristic (center), and wacky (top)**
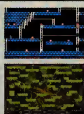
The famous original *Lode Runner* (top), or "the blue version" as it is called by Presage employees, was created solely by Doug Smith and published by Broderbund in 1983. The remake (above), dubbed *Lode Runner One*, came courtesy of Presage and Sierra and featured enhanced graphics and colorful backgrounds. It shipped in 1993.

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Original *Lode Runner* designer Doug Smith is working on "discovery levels" that will actually scroll

like eight-player and 16-player stuff that's competitive and cooperative."

Mathews explains that characters can morph into different items and cloak themselves to appear as the enemies. And sure enough, players can choose the gender of their character, which Mathews says was a pre-Lara Croft decision, based on the team's enthusiasm for the *Aeon Flux* animated series.

Technologically, the game is being designed to work off of a hybrid disc for Mac and PC. It will run in 16-bit graphics and support 3D sound. Level design is under way, and Doug Smith, creator of the original, is on board to consult and design levels. Smith and Presage are currently joint owners of *Lode Runner* property, and Mathews says that Smith is actively seeking a deal for an N64

version. While no code has been carried over from the previous versions of the games, the team has borrowed from the original AI to capture the clumsy feeling of the enemies.

"It needs to become apparent," says Presage President Ed Murphy, "almost immediately, that you are in control of these monks." And it's the president of this 30-person San Francisco area development house (who still enjoys cleaning up code) who explains the game's magic most succinctly. "Once you understand that you can control the monks, you understand that you can solve any puzzle that's in the game. And then everything has to feel right when you're moving, of course. And then all of a sudden, you feel very much in control, very rapidly."

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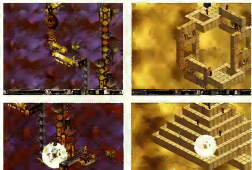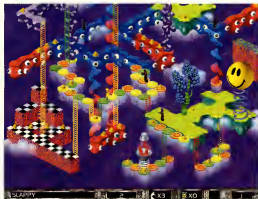
While not "true 3D" in the current sense of the term, the levels extend as much vertically as they do along the horizontal plane

Read this while you still have time to save a life.

Gamer First Aid

1 Stop the game.

2 Call for help.

3 Act quickly. The victim may faint.

4 Get to the nearest hospital!

Wartorn

The realtime strategy genre finally finds the key to 3D gaming. Now, can Impact deliver on the execution?

Wartorn will feature multiplayer support over a LAN and the internet upon its release

Part of the key to making realtime strategy work in 3D is the camera control

I f there's one thing missing from the realtime strategy genre, it's the immersive quality of the graphics. So what gives *Wartorn*, a fully 3D realtime strategy game, its potential is that the 3D graphics are actually trying to enhance gameplay. Because of gameplay issues, most titles in the genre are locked into a high-above (satellite) view, giving players a certain detached feeling. There's no thrill of "being there," the way players feel in action games. But *Wartorn* hopes to change all that with its multifaceted interface and intense war-time action.

The game's approach to 3D is more akin to *Mario 64* than other realtime strategy games in that players control the camera, thus giving them the best perspective on what's going on and allowing for maximum gameplay control. Sometimes a traditional satellite view will be the player's best option; other times, for instance, when the troops are about to roll over an enemy encampment, a ground-level camera angle will provide a more dramatic experience. Being able to manipulate the camera angle also allows for a greater understanding and use of the varied topography, which offers such strategic options as positioning snipers and hiding from enemy troops.

Eyst has taken a similar approach to gameplay, which has been described as

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Impact
Developer:	Eyst
Release Date:	Q2 1998
Origin:	Australia

"extremely scalable." The idea is to give the player a greater sense of control. The developers are making a special point to offer as much depth as the most hard-core realtime strategy fan would demand without forcing anything on those who don't care that German tanks run three kilometers faster than Russian tanks.

Now that the engine is up and running, though, the team's main concern is tweaking the gameplay. The results should be very interesting. **ng**
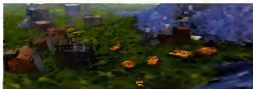
A fully scalable gameplay model is being implemented to give players their choice of how deep to go

The way games ought to be...

In search of the future of gameplay

"From one extreme to the other ..."

by **Neil West**

Neil West is **Next Generation's** editor-at-large

Someone (whose name I can't reveal) sent me a letter. He describes the world conditions under which many of today's games are made. I think it's worth sharing his story as both a disturbing peak behind the scenes of the game industry's darker side and also as proof that all my moaning and clamoring isn't (purely) my paranoia. Anyway, here it is ...

I just wanted to thank you for your article. It really cheered me up. I worked as a game designer for a few years at a developer that followed that typical assembly-line strategy you outlined. And it produced just the quality of titles you'd expect.

The people there are talented and fun to be around. They love games and would like to produce quality titles. The problem is that management doesn't really care about making titles with good gameplay. They want titles that look good, meet the letter of the publisher's contract, and ship on time (oh, and having some new "trick" to boast about, no matter how useless, like "realtime hair growth on all characters!"). Paying attention to the quality of gameplay is frowned upon, as it requires fading the game, making changes, or otherwise endangering the chances of the game hitting its next milestone deadline on time. To management, it's more important to simply produce a product (as fast as possible) that ensures the publisher will send money.

Recently, things managed to get worse. The design department was told that we were only to make concept documents and draw up the initial design. Basically, we were to produce promotional flyers filled with catchy text, colorful descriptions of gameplay (emphasize how "fun" it is and how "original" it is), and pretty pictures, to be used in landing new contracts. We weren't to be involved with the actual development of the game at all. The theory being that if any gameplay issues arise during development, the artists and programmers will sit down and redesign the game on the fly, while still putting in a full 12-hour day creating artwork and code. Mind you, with the schedules they are expected to keep, the programmers and artists have trouble getting their own work done on time.

Adding to the problems is the official stance that procedures like testing the game during development or even prototyping concepts aren't required for any project — even projects that involve creating a new game format from scratch. If there are any problems in the product, they'll be fixed during beta-testing. But realistically, the games aren't even close to being done during

beta-testing, and anything other than cosmetic changes are forbidden, as they might delay the title further.

As I was once told, flat out: "If they pay us to make shit, we make shit."

— name & address withheld

Not all game development companies work in this shoddy manner. But no matter how forward-thinking a company may be, at the end of the day, the same business pressures apply. "Management" will always balance the needs of the development team with the need to work within strict cash and time restraints. It's just a matter of where it chooses to strike that balance. Will it risk more development resources (both time and money) in the hope of a better-selling game? Or will it keep costs to a minimum and shoot for a smaller but lower risk target? You pays your money and you takes your chances — more than one company has been broken by overly ambitious product goals.

The management of the company discussed in the letter obviously decided that spending money on improving gameplay wasn't a sound investment. But now let's consider a management approach that falls at the other end of the spectrum, where a development team is given all the time and money it needs. Let's look at a development team given so much creative freedom that its bosses effectively rested the fate of their entire company on its shoulders. Of course, I'm talking about Nintendo, Shigeru Miyamoto*, and his Mario team.

Nintendo 64 was delayed by more than a year, largely because Miyamoto and his team needed more time to finish *Super Mario 64*. Nintendo Chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi felt it be known that he would wait as long as it took for the game to be perfect. He trusted Miyamoto implicitly, and the best console game ever released was the result. So let's look at what Miyamoto did with all that time. Let's try to work out the principles of game creation that, if allowed, result in the best titles.

I've been lucky enough to meet with Miyamoto five or six times in my career, and he's always been happy to share the secrets of his success. What I've tried to do here is condense his interview responses and comments into a series of "rules" or guidelines by which he works. Of course, these are purely my interpretations — but they are all his words. And I hope that the following list sheds a little light on how games should be developed.

Shigeru Miyamoto's rules of good game design, as interpreted by Neil West:

Start with a simple concept

"The original *Mario* concept was just an idea: running, climbing, and jumping."

Design around the computer's limitations

"When *Mario* was created, graphics technology was very limited. He wears dungarees because that way you can see his arms move. He wears a hat because his hair would look silly if it remained static. His mustache is there because there weren't enough pixels to separate his mouth from his nose."

Carefully balance form and function

"I put much emphasis on the playability of a game, so I usually make characters that are suitable for certain game scenarios and actions. When we are making, say, ten enemy characters for one game, the designs of five characters are determined by the traits of the character. For example, in *Super Mario Bros*, we wanted a character which Mario could step on and turn upside down, so we made a turtle-looking character. Only then are the remaining five characters determined by what kind of graphics we want in a certain part of gameplay. Here the process is reversed as the characters' function is based upon the predetermined graphic, its look."

Minimize the player's confusion

"We are always trying to make games in which the player can determine, without consulting with the instruction manual or guidebook, what he or she should do with the enemies or obstacles he or she encounters. For example, one can easily tell that an enemy with thorns should not be hit."

The importance of play testing

"First we map out each level on graph paper. Next we implement them on the hardware. Then we simply play the game and tweak the levels until we are happy with them. Then we go through each level and add the secret, hidden things. A lot of playing has to be done before a game is perfect. The secret of the *Super Mario* games is that we play and play and play!"

Aim to re-create raw emotions, not specific scenes

"Imagine the spirit — the state of mind — of a kid when he enters a cave alone. Going in, he must feel the cold air around him. He must discover a branch off to one side and decide whether to explore or not. Sometimes he loses his way. If you go to the cave now, as an adult, it might be silly, trivial, a small cave. But as a child, in spite of being learned to go, you could not resist the temptation. It was a small moment then. This feeling must be realized in the game."

The relative importance of graphics

"As a videogame is an audio/visual work, better graphics are welcome. However, this is only provided that it does not disturb the playability. And, when I say better graphics, I do not necessarily always mean more realistic graphics."

Lure players off of the beaten path

"We design games so players will try many things apart from the main course. One way to induce players to explore is with hidden secrets. The players are thinking, 'Well, I don't see anything here, but it can be, it's possible.' Then the player is curious enough to visit that place. When he finds something he never expected he feels, 'Ah, I did it. I made it.' It's a great kind of satisfaction."

Leave room for the novice

"One difficult problem is that we have to make games for both players who have played our games before and new gameplayers. The game should not only give further excitement to the experienced player but also let the new gameplayers play it very comfortably. Experienced players who want to conquer the game can do so, but newcomers can have fun just touching the controller, moving Mario, and finding many secrets in the games. These novice players can enjoy themselves a lot, away from the mainstream on the game."

Incorporate a smooth learning curve

"It is people's nature to want to feel that they are making improvements in their gameplay. The more skillful they become with their fingers, the more clever they become. I design games so that people feel like improving their skills by trying again and again. And here the game balance becomes a very important factor. Players are required to think how to meet the challenges presented by game designers, first with an easy puzzle and gradually with increasing difficulties. Solving the ultimate puzzle should require the piling up of skills and problem solving from the previous difficulties."

Accommodate all skill levels

"We are not aiming for any specific age group, but we set the level of difficulties very carefully. In the case of action games, if we set the level of difficulty at age seven or around there, the level is suitable also for papas and mamas in their forties and fifties who could not experience TV games in

their childhood. In this way, the game will appeal to a large age group. On the other hand, if we set the difficulty level at around 18 years, it would not allow other large segments to play the game."

Place gamer's desires before your own

"In the past, 3D games have been developed selfishly by the creators — they are games for developers, not gamers. We came at Super Mario 64 from the other side and tried to cater to the selfishness of the end users — with control, game camera, and ease of play."

Think "quality not quantity" when incorporating game music

"Many game producers want high-quality music in their games — say, a full orchestra sound. But instead of seeking to increase the quantity of music, we should try to think of a game's music quality and interactivity. Musicians may be disappointed with the quantity and range of data that they can use [especially with a cartridge format], but over time I think they will learn to use and appreciate it. They should brush up their skills in producing interactive music, and eventually technology will allow this type of sound composition to match that of prerecorded music."

Keep it simple

"We are in the mainstream plug-and-play entertainment business. In Japan now, the miniature-type LCD Tetris games are a huge market, and this is largely because they are very simple to play. Also, when players get tired of it, they can throw it away. I believe this is also the destiny of the videogame entertainment market. If they are cheap, easy to buy, and simple to play, then people will tend to buy them. But if they are rather complicated and troublesome, then people will be deterred from buying something new, and it will be a long time before they will become a mainstream entertainment market."

Appeal to a player's 'inner child'

"Games are a trigger for adults to again become

primitive and primal, as a way of thinking and remembering. An adult is a child who has more ethics and morals, that's all. When I am a child, creating, I am not creating a game — I am in the game. The game is not for children, it is for me. It is for the adult that still has a character of a child."

Most importantly of all ...

"The most important factor is making players feel 'comfortable' with a game. It is minute and delicate fine-tuning that can give players the comfort to manipulate their character just as they wish through the hand-held controller. This comfort is achieved by the perfect integration of graphics, sound, and playability with perfectly synchronized timing."

So there are a few words of wisdom from Shigeru Miyamoto. And personally, I can't think of any console developer more qualified to hand out lessons. Following the guidelines listed above (and, no doubt, numerous others), Miyamoto has consistently proven himself to be the very best in the business. And before signing off for this month, I'll leave you with a word of caution from Miyamoto himself to those who will seek to emulate him: "I do not know if any game characters are often imitated, but I could agree that our game content is often imitated. Unfortunately, our competitors seem to simply try to imitate the surface and just end up making very badly balanced games. They never try to understand why and how we have done what we do to achieve each game's content."

Game developers take note!

> "I design games so that people feel like improving their skills by trying again and again"
> *Shigeru Miyamoto*

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* Shigeru Miyamoto joined Nintendo in 1977 and has been responsible (as either producer, director, or designer) for more than 25 games, including: Donkey Kong (arcade), Mario Bros (arcade), Donkey Kong Jnr (arcade), Super Mario Bros (NES), Super Mario Bros 2 (NES), Super Mario Bros 3 (NES), Super Mario World (SNES), Legend of Zelda (NES), Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past (SNES), Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening (Game Boy), F-Zero (SNES), Pilot Wings (SNES), Super Mario Kart (SNES), StarFox FX (SNES), Kirby's Dream Land (SNES), Stunt Race FX (SNES), Donkey Kong Country (SNES), Excitebike (NES), Super Metroid (SNES), Donkey Kong '94 (Game Boy), Yoshi's Island (SNES), Super Mario 64 (N64), PilotWings 64 (N64), Wave Race (N64), StarFox 64 (N64).

Want to respond?

We'll be including a 'The Way Games Ought To Be' Q&A in future issues, so if you have any comments, criticisms, or questions, email Neil West at theway@next-generation.com or write The Way Games Ought To Be, Next Generation, Imagine Publishing, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. Email is of course our preferred method of communication

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If you haven't visited IGN recently

then you've missed…

FIFA Road to the World Cup 64 Nintendo 64 **Colony Wars** PlayStation **Sonic R** Saturn **G.Police** PC **Riven: The Sequel to Myst** Macintosh **Time Crisis** PlayStation **Myth** PC **Quake** Saturn **Alundra** PlayStation

finals

Next Generation reviews: a sacred trust

110	Nintendo 64
110	PlayStation
114	Saturn
117	PC
122	Macintosh

Next Generation's Star Guides provide a quick way to get our general impression of a game. But unless you read the review, you're only getting half the story. To get all the information you need to know before making a purchasing decision, read the whole review; don't stop at the stars.

★★★★★ **Revolutionary**
Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high watermark.

★★★★ **Excellent**
A high-quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★ **Good**
A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★ **Average**
Perhaps competent — certainly uninspired.

★ **Bad**
Crucially flawed in design or application.

⦿ Denotes a review appearing on the Next Generation Disc.

🔴 Denotes a review of a Japanese product.

Nintendo 64

FIFA Road to the World Cup 64
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **EA Canada**

This once-proud EA franchise made its first N64 appearance more than a year ago and was rightfully trounced in these pages. The developers took the criticism to heart and vowed to produce the best N64 soccer game of the year, which was quite a lofty goal considering the high quality of International Superstar Soccer 64 from Konami.

Unfortunately, FIFA RTTWC 64 doesn't quite live up to the standards set by Konami's killer app. However, all of the gameplay and graphic improvements make it a great game — arguably the second best soccer game on any system. The first thing you'll notice about FIFA is the massively improved graphics that use the high-res mode of N64 to give the game a sharp look that's unlike anything

The high-res graphics in FIFA RTTWC 64 are excellent, even when coming in close

else on the system. Other huge improvements include the motion of the players and the physics on the ball. This time around, the game looks as good in motion as it does in screenshots. There are, however, still some problems with the frame rate on occasion — these give the game a choppy look at times.

But while the overall graphics are

excellent, the real improvement in this year's FIFA is how it plays. The game gives players control over a plethora of moves, including slides, headers, lobs, through passes, bicycle kicks, and four different kinds of tackles. With all of the new moves, this game is great for both beginners and advanced gamers. And where FIFA outshines all comers in the soccer game world is in the inclusion of every major soccer league, every country's national team, and an amazing true-to-life run to the World Cup. Actually trying to qualify for the Cup with pretty boy Vinnie up front and the popular yet surprisingly untalented Alexi Lalas in defense is an extreme challenge that lends itself to hours of gameplay.

The game still doesn't have the fluidity of ISS 64, but the real players and variety of options make FIFA RTTWC 64 a game that soccer fans all over the world should enjoy.
Rating: ★★★★

PlayStation

Alundra
Publisher: **Working Designs**
Developer: **Climax** ⦿

Working Designs picked a solid winner when it decided to port the action RPG Alundra for its PlayStation RPG debut. As usual, the company has given the game its trademark treatment by adding an animated cinema intro and rewriting the text in order to make the storyline more involving for American gamers. The result is a perfectly balanced mix of action, involvement, and evenly paced progression. The storyline, which centers around a young boy named Alundra who possesses the psychic ability to enter other people's dreams, loosely frames the action within the game

While not as technologically advanced as the recent RPG offering from Square, Alundra more than makes up for it in the gameplay department. With a level of depth not ordinarily found in today's games, Alundra ensures that the gamer will spend many a sleepless night trying to figure out just how to access the countless, intricately designed dungeons the puzzles require a lot of thought,

Alundra's graphics are only fair, but its depth, dungeon designs, and gameplay make up for it

planning, and persistence — a refreshing change from the usual "walk-light-walk" pattern found in more traditional, turn-based RPGs. Also, as one of the first action/RPGs available for PlayStation, Alundra concentrates more on skills and exploration rather than linear reason-based structures. With each dungeon that is defeated, players acquire new skills that allow them to explore more and more of the massive landscape. These gameplay mechanics closely mirror the Zelda series and other such titles, and this is the real draw of the game

With all of the emphasis on

gameplay and interaction, however, Alundra is a little weak in the graphics department. The developer Climax based the game on an engine that's eerily similar to its 16-bit Genesis action/RPG Landstalker, and the visual details of Alundra are only slight improvements over those of its predecessor. However, gamers will likely be too involved in solving puzzles and discovering new territory to notice or care. Working Designs made a smart decision importing Alundra, and any gamer looking for a unique challenge is guaranteed to appreciate it.
**Rating:** ★★★★

Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Midway Collection 2
Publisher: **Midway**
Developer: **Digital Eclipse**

The retro gaming craze is obviously starting to wane, due partly to an overabundance of dodgy old-school collections. Fortunately, the Midway series continues to shine in Arcade's Greatest Hits, The Midway Collection 2,

the company's second collection of Midway/Williams titles. With only one duffer (the rare-for-a-reason Splat) and the inclusion of a challenging bonus trivia game and some amazing, rare, Vid Kidz bites, it's definitely worth the price.

At the top of the list is Spy Hunter, complete with Peter Gunn theme music and oversensitive controls. Midway has even gone through the trouble of redoing
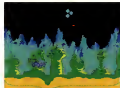
Yep, it's *Moon Patrol*, just one of the nostalgia-laden gems found in *Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Midway Collection 2*

the LED weapons displays from the cabinet, albeit in digital form. If you're a true gamer, you're already familiar with Spy Hunter and know that this is reason alone to purchase this collection. Two other arcade favorites, Burger Time and Moon Patrol, put in appearances and are just as fun as they were back in the day. Moon Patrol is especially noteworthy for its lengthy levels and funky music.

True fans, however, will undoubtedly blow their gaskets when they learn this collection also includes two very rare games: Blaster and Joust 2: Blaster was amazing in its day — arguably it was the first ever 3D first-person shooter. And it's even in high res.

All in all, Midway Collection 2 brings the glory days of the arcade back without feeling like a cash-in. Hallelujah

Rating: ★★★★

Monster Rancher

Publisher: **Tecmo**
Developer: **Tecmo**

The virtual pet craze has finally hit the U.S. console market (we won't even get into Pocket Monsters) in this gem from Tecmo. The premise is similar to the handheld electronic Tomagotchis in that players care for and nurture an animal to "adulthood." However, this is where the similarity ends. Not simply limited to how to take of your monster, the game incorporates a wide variety of options and possibilities (namely, combat with other monsters) that gives the game an awesome amount of depth.

Your monster is completely hands-on. Players can choose what to feed it, how to train it, and how to control it in a battle scenario, and they can help guide it through mini mazes on exploratory jaunts to mysterious ruins. There's a huge number of items to discover,

Join the Resistance

Psygnosis' *Colony Wars* redefines the space shooting genre

The game features craft and universe databases for an in-depth perspective on all the different spacecraft. Using the first-person view really gives the feeling of being in the cockpit

Colony Wars

Publisher: **Psygnosis**
Developer: **Psygnosis Liverpool Studio**

Those who have watched the epic space battles of Star Wars, Star Trek, or Babylon 5 and fantasized about piloting a fighter of their own will have their dreams realized by playing Colony Wars. Players take part as members of a colonial rebellion trying to break free from an imperialistic Earth. The storyline is patterned after the American Revolution but set in the far future, where the weapons of choice are highly maneuverable single-person space fighters and enormous capital ships

The game offers more than 70 potential missions, which, much like Wing Commander, unfold during a nonlinear storyline that can lead to at least six different endings. Because the missions aren't presented in the same order, the campaign differs each time it's played, adding significant replay value. The clean FMV sequences and ersatz James Earl Jones narration turn the game into a truly cinematic experience, as does the extensive use of dialogue, both before and during each mission. It all comes together to make players truly feel as if they're part of a larger struggle.

Of course, none of this would matter if the gameplay didn't measure up, but it does. Control is spot on, especially when using Sony's analog pad. The game can be played from three different perspectives, including a very

playable third-person view with all the HUD information on the screen. The number and variety of weapons are impressive, and each has its own specific use depending on the situation. Much like X-Wing or TIE Fighter, it's left to the player to decide how best to approach and accomplish each mission, although there is usually a "best" way.

The Colony Wars universe is both massive and beautiful, with a multitude of planets, suns, and other celestial eye candy. Interestingly, every heavenly body in the game's universe can be flown to, although flying out of the skirmish area will likely result in losing the battle. However, the simple fact that it is possible to travel literally everywhere goes a long way towards giving players a real feeling of freedom. A sense of speed, something that is hard to accomplish in a space shooter, is achieved by physics-defying stars and space dust that whiz by, nicely capturing the same feeling of space flight we're used to from the movies.

A technological marvel, Colony Wars seems to redefine what is possible on PlayStation. The special effects used throughout are both eye-popping and superior to just about anything that has come before on any platform. Simply put, this game is not to be missed.

Rating: ★★★★★

rating

See the Light

The double whammy of game and gun makes *Time Crisis* the best light-gun game for PlayStation

Time Crisis
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **Namco**

When *Time Crisis* hit arcades, it was lauded for its innovative approach to the standard light-gun shooter gameplay. The simple addition of a duck-and-wait button gave players a semblance of control over how the game progressed and distinguished the title from its competitors.

The PlayStation version is almost exactly like

Taking the *Virtua Cop* model one step further, *Time Crisis* excels

the arcade version but with lower-resolution graphics and a second gameplay mode. Also, instead of using a foot pedal to duck and reload, this version utilizes finger buttons that require players to keep two hands on the (included) "Guncon" at all times. For most players this is not a problem, but it will affect some people's shooting style.

The graphics are less polished than those in the arcade version, but the sacrifice in resolution is more than made up for in game speed and character animation. Borrowing one of the best features of Sega's *Virtua Cop*, the game features bad guys who react differently depending on how they are shot.

A new arcade mode gives depth to the title and makes the game considerably longer than the arcade version. The Guncon is a well-designed peripheral that feels solid and shoots almost pixel-accurate — something Namco has worked into the game's design, with enemies that pop their heads out from behind obstacles far in the distance.

Unfortunately, only one player at a time can

OK, so it only supports one player at a time. Who cares? This is great stuff by any measure

play, which is disappointing, considering the fact that most gamers are used to two-player shootouts. Also, there are no "hostages" or other good guys to avoid shooting, shaving off any pretense of strategy, and the barely interactive backgrounds could have been better. Along with the complete lack of weapon power-ups, these small shortcomings knock the title down a notch. However, when compared to other light-gun shooters for home systems, *Time Crisis* is as good as it gets.

Rating: **★★★★**

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characters to meet, and monsters to create — all these ensure constant discovery every time the game is played. And while the game's basic concept, simplistic graphics, and cutesy soundtrack may not strike every gamer's fancy, *Monster Rancher* is definitely a title that must be played in order to be fully appreciated.

Other than the week-to-week care involved, players must learn the ropes of the battle circuits, wherein their creations can progress through specific

Create your very own monster in *Monster Rancher*, a game with incredible replay value

"fighting ranks." Also important is breeding different kinds of monsters in town to create new and unique types of animals. One of the more interesting and unique features of *Monster Rancher* is the ability to create monsters from music, game, or computer CDs. Players can dial up the appropriate screen, pop in a favorite CD, and the game will generate a monster based on what it finds on the disc (by analyzing track numbers and lengths). This feature alone is guaranteed to send players scrambling around their entire CD collection in an attempt to discover the perfect monster.

Beyond being a good rancher, players' main objective is to reach the status of Master Breeder by winning specific battles. This is no easy feat, and it requires a lot of time and preparation to finish the game. But this journey to the end is filled with plenty of intriguing areas and enough side missions that the amount of effort put into cultivating the monster's abilities (and the rages of frustration when losing battles) doesn't seem so harsh. The overall result is an addictive yet time-consuming title that

deserves to attract a whole new and greatful audience to the narrow niche of life sim gaming.

Rating: **★★★★★**

Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub Zero

Publisher: **Midway**
Developer: **Midway**

The *Mortal Kombat* series hasn't always been at the forefront of videogame innovation, but at least it's held its own in the fighting arena, finally even conceding to switch to 3D with *Mortal Kombat 4*. *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub Zero* is Midway's attempt to branch out and take the series in new directions. However, why Midway believed *MK*'s new direction should be a side-scrolling action/adventure title, especially one with so little to it, is beyond us.

First off, the game is 2D. This in itself isn't necessarily a drawback (*Castlevania* is 2D and a triumph), but

Mythologies isn't a very well-done 2D game — strange, considering how many previous examples of the genre Midway could have looked to for inspiration. The look of the game is decidedly retro, with stiff, digitized, sprite-based characters that appear extremely out of place in this age of 3D and polygons. The character design is so lame that it feels more like moving *Sub Zero* left to right in an *MK* arena than an actual side-scrolling game.

But the game's most glaring flaw is its control. The button configuration is

Fighting bad guys is practically impossible thanks to the terrible control in *Sub Zero*
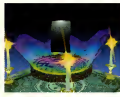
much too cumbersome and confusing, requiring multiple button presses to perform simple actions like running. Running around is accomplished by pressing a shoulder button and becomes terribly frustrating while fighting. Response time is much too slow, and generally by the time Sub Zero has turned around, his assailant has already jumped over him again.

Despite a few good features, like the game's RPG elements, *Mythologies* just isn't any fun. After fighting several cookie-cutter enemies and getting railed in unpredictable traps, even the most hard-core *Mortal Kombat* fans will find themselves frustrated and angry. There's just no excuse for a game like this.
Rating: ★

NCAA GameBreaker '98
Publisher: **Sony Computer Entertainment**
Developer: **Sony Interactive Studios**

What do you get when you take the best pro football engine on the planet and spend several months tweaking it for a college football game? Obviously, you get the best college football game anywhere. But even more impressively, in this case,

GameBreaker '98 is GameDay '98 with college teams and regulations — not a bad thing

you get a game that's actually better than NFL *GameDay '98*, a feat we didn't expect at all.

GameDay's smooth 3D engine has been reworked to incorporate the look and playing styles of college football, but that's not all. The developers also took the time to create logos and uniforms for every Division I school in existence. Did we mention that Sony's added a play editor, advanced AI, season awards, and the biggest playbooks in all of videogame football too?

But perhaps the biggest advancement is the ability to intercept a pass — a feature that was absent even from *GameDay*. Now, if you've got tight enough coverage and time the jump correctly, you can make a pick and take the ball back the other way. What this does to gameplay is completely change strategies, defenses, and offenses. So when the defense is about to nail the quarterback for a sack, throwing the ball

up for grabs isn't such a good idea.

Sure *NCAA GameBreaker '98* borrows heavily from *GameDay*, but amazingly, the end result is a football game that has no equal.
Rating: ★★★★★

Nightmare Creatures
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Kalisto**

Halloween may have come and gone, but for those who enjoy a good scare year-round, *Nightmare Creatures* should nicely fill in the spaces between. Pat Buchanan speeches. While it has its quirks and shortcomings, the game certainly does things well enough to warrant a look.

One of the first post-*Tomb Raider* 3D adventures, *Nightmare Creatures* combines exploration in spooky environments with "weapons-assisted" combat. The player can opt to play the role of Ignatius, a monk who delivers us from evil with the end of his staff, or Nadia, yet another of those heavily armed, pulchritudinous femme fatales it seems no current game can do without. The levels are the same for either character, bringing players through gothic 17th century London scenarios,

Nightmare Creatures is solid enough, but the spooky atmosphere is the big draw

including sewers, abandoned city streets, and sprawling graveyards, all carefully textured, dramatically lit, and draped in true 3D fog. Each is an atmospheric treat and a compelling backdrop for the action.

Complementing the environments are the many hell-spawned creatures encountered. *Nightmare Creatures* features the finest polygonal enemies found in any PlayStation game to date, and that takes into account some of the early work we've seen so far in *Resident Evil 2*. In a gruesome touch, their limbs can be chopped off, and they can be dismembered in a braveheart-like manner Spells and projectile power-ups add to the visual flair, and the malevolent soundtrack keeps the player unnerved the entire time.

But that's pretty much where the fun ends. Alas, the gameplay is based mostly around repetitive combat, not exploration, which is something of a

shame considering the compelling world Kalisto created. Also, the control isn't nearly as polished as it should be for some of the close-quarter combat. The camera is effective about 80% of the time, but that other 20% will have players perfecting their French. While the visuals are compelling enough to drive many players forward, the repetitive action is enough to make most wait for a level select code and a weekend rental.
Rating: ★★★

Shipwreckers!
Publisher: **Psygnosis**
Developer: **Psygnosis**

Psygnosis is known for a lot of things, but thankfully, churning out copycat games isn't one of them. Its new pirate action game *Shipwreckers!* certainly doesn't look or play like anything else on PlayStation, but the title is overshadowed by *Psygnosis'* other holiday releases, *G-Police* and *Colony Wars.*

An overhead game that blends polygons and sprites to great effect, *Shipwreckers!* is interesting, if ultimately limited. Players pilot a pirate ship through 20 segmented levels, capturing ports of call and avoiding dangerous hazards like blasts of fire or giant,

Despite nice water effects, Shipwreckers! doesn't measure up to recent Psygnosis efforts

rotating saws, as well as other ships. It's a decidedly different gameplay experience, to say the least.

Oddest of all, though, is the control, which refuses to take into account the fact that players are navigating a large galleon. The ship stops and goes on a dime and can rotate in place — there's absolutely no wind at all. Anyone who remembers Sid Meier's *Pirates* might be disappointed with the decidedly arcadelike feel of *Shipwreckers!* but reality issues aside, the control is solid and responsive, so avoiding hazards is a question of reflexes, not luck.

Graphically speaking, *Shipwreckers!* isn't up there with other, more inspiring *Psygnosis* titles (*Wipeout XL* comes to mind), but the combination of an overhead perspective and small, sprite-based ships makes for a quaint, if nostalgic look that hearkens back to the 16-bit era. The simple gameplay is also reminiscent of those bygone days, but

rating

PlayStation

while a nice change of pace, it can tend to get a little tedious after three or four levels. The end result is somewhat flat. The two- to four-player deathmatches, on the other hand, make *Shadowtroopers* a fast, fun party game, a port that should not be overlooked.

Ultimately, *Shadowtroopers* is a fun, quirky little title with occasional moments of brilliance. However, with so many other great games out right now, it falls a little short of the mark.

Rating: ★★★

Spawn: The Eternal
Publisher: **Sony**
Developer **Sony Interactive**

There are many reasons not to buy *Spawn: The Eternal*, Sony's action/adventure game based on the comic book by Todd McFarlane. Most of these involve the kinds of flaws and problems typically found in licensed games, like terrible gameplay, abysmal control, and sub-par graphics. It would appear that in releasing this game, Sony has not learned from others' mistakes.

Spawn is set up much like any of the current crop of third-person action

The awful *Spawn* has so many problems, we don't even know where to begin

titles, in which brainpower takes a backseat to punching and kicking. This wouldn't be a bad thing if the action segments were worth waiting for, but unfortunately, they're not. Whenever a bad guy is approached, the camera switches from a third-person to a side-on perspective, causing momentary confusion. Control also switches strangely, requiring players to change from pressing up on the D-pad to pressing right to move *Spawn* forward

Enemy AI is as basic as it gets — most enemies can be beaten just by repeatedly pressing kick. Enemies in the distance just walk around their tiny perimeters like bored rodents, waiting for the player to come closer. The scattered "puzzles" are equally inane. It doesn't take a *Mensa* candidate to figure out that a switch upstairs will open a door downstairs.

"*Spawn*" fans will be especially

disappointed with the way their hero has been presented. His cape only appears during combat, and when walking, he looks like an overly large circus freak, complete with a hunchback and slight limp. The textures in the game are as chunky as they come, miles away from the sumptuous artwork of the comic. Overall, the playing experience isn't just not fun, it's deeply unpleasant. It seems that at every junction, the wrong decisions were made on this project.

Disheartengly, *Spawn: The Eternal* will probably sell just because of the attached license, proving that we haven't learned a damn thing in all the years of movie-licensed games, from E.T. up to this atrocity. Shame on Sony

Rating: ★

Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi
Publisher **LucasArts**
Developer: **LucasArts**

LucasArts just keeps pumping out the *Star Wars* games. Some, like *Jedi Knight* or *TIE Fighter*, are solid games that happen to take place in the *Star Wars*

Luke and Han duke it out in *Masters of Teras Kasi.* Cue rolling eyes and heavy groan

universe. However, sometimes Lucas seems to throw a few *Star Wars* characters on top of a mediocre game, with disappointing results (*Rebel Assault* or *Shadows of the Empire*, anyone?). *Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi* falls squarely into this latter category.

A 3D brawler with almost no notable features, *Masters* takes its one stab at innovation by dividing gameplay between hand-to-hand and weapons-based combat modes at the press of a button. However, when given the option of fighting with such attractive weapons as lightsabers and blasters, there's really no point in using fists. The control configuration is different for the two modes (fistlike for fists, *Soul Blade*-like for weapons), which makes keeping track of which button does what a bit of a chore — something a fighting game, or any game for that matter, should never do

The biggest downfall of *Masters*, though, is the speed of the game — or rather, lack thereof. The control is extremely unresponsive, causing players to mash the buttons repeatedly just to pull off one move. Plus, the characters move like their Kenner counterparts — stiffly — with few frames of animation and absolutely no head tracking. It's also worth noting that since there are so few women in the *Star Wars* universe, LucasArts has simply invented a new one, Arden Lyn, just to up the quotient of trendy female combatants — talk about desperation moves.

Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi isn't all bad. The fighters do look like the real thing, and even some of the lesser characters like Thok, the Gamorean Guard, have a few impressive special moves. In the end, though, the problems outweigh the positives, and in terms of play mechanics, there's nothing here that hasn't been done before. If it weren't for the license, this game would be about as generic as they come, which makes playing *Masters of Teras Kasi* about as fun as falling into the Sarlaic and being digested for a thousand years.

Rating: ★★

WCW Nitro
Publisher: **THQ Inc.**
Developer: **Inland Productions**

Wrestling games are a strange beast to evaluate. Traditionally they've been nothing special in quality, yet they have still managed to garner a respectably large following. With this in mind, it's easy to say that *WCW Nitro* is a fine example of the genre: it's fun and easy to play, but not exactly rocket science.

Featuring 16 big-name professional wrestlers from the WCW, the gameplay in *WCW Nitro* is a bit on the simplistic side. All of the most popular moves associated with this brand of wrestling are included, as well as signature moves for each name wrestler. The only problem is that the moves are so easy

Wrestling fan? *WCW Nitro* delivers what you expect — fun, simple entertainment

to pull that gameplay is reduced to a contest of button-mashing rather than anything requiring a modicum of strategy, tactics, or skill. But, since most fans will probably just want to see their favorite moves A.S.A.P., this probably won't be much of a disappointment. Also, the inclusion of the usual features like the ability to go outside the ring and climb the ropes for airborne moves keeps things from getting too stale. On occasion, "allies" of wrestlers even enter the ring to disrupt matches if their competitor is in trouble.

WCW Nitro probably isn't going to win any awards: the graphics are average at best, and the character animation is frequently stiff and awkward. The control is only so-so, but since (as noted above) precise control isn't all that necessary, that complaint is pretty moot

To be honest, we preferred the technical wrestling moves in Activision's slower-paced *PowerMove*, but this game has one more thing that game lacked — the WCW license Ultimately, *WCW Nitro*, not unlike actual wrestling, delivers fun, if not terribly sophisticated entertainment.

Rating: ★★★

Saturn

Quake
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Lobotomy Software**

Porting *Quake* to a console is nothing more than an excuse for bragging rights. It's simply a way to show that the limited architecture of a 32-bit system has the power to push the same game that those mighty Pentium PCs take for granted. Lobotomy has succeeded to a surprising degree, but ultimately, this version reveals some of *Quake's* inherent single-player problems.

All of *Quake's* existing 28 levels have been rebuilt for Saturn, so a familiar corner might not lead down

The Saturn conversion actually improves the *Quake* concept, including the special effects

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Saturn

Head Spin

Sonic R

Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Traveller's Tales**

Sonic is finally in 3D, and although it's not what we expected, it ain't bad

While it's a different approach to a *Sonic* game, *Sonic R* is a concept that works

For more than two years, the Saturn market begged for a true *Sonic* title that pushed the system the way the previous games drove Genesis. And after a couple of tantalizing tastes, first with *Sonic 3D Blast* and then his 3D cameo in *Sonic Jam*, the sacred blue hedgehog has finally spun onto Saturn.

Sonic R is easily the most visually impressive Saturn title ever. Not only does the game feature a smooth polygonal engine, but *Sonic R* also utilizes some truly outstanding effects — like transparencies and reflective surfaces — that no other developer ever figured out how to do on Saturn. And with the unique racing premise, the designers thankfully stayed within the *Sonic* franchise by keeping the challenge on foot instead of simply resorting to making a *Mario Kart* clone. True, a handful of characters — nemesis Robotnik for one — sport characteristic vehicles,

but it just wouldn't be right if the fastest mascot alive had to remain cooped up in a dinky automobile.

The single obvious stumbling block is the control. Maneuvering characters around tight turns and corners takes a lot of patience, but the proper techniques, with time, can be learned. Perhaps the multitude of hidden extra characters and tracks will be encouragement enough to sit and master the game. These secrets add so much to the exploration of the huge levels that, much like its N64 counterpart *Diddy Kong Racing*, *Sonic R* becomes less of a racing title and more of a driving adventure game.

As a racing title, *Sonic R* may not be the *Sonic* game for every Saturn owner's wish list, but it does send the hedgehog convincingly into the world of 3D and lets him bow out of the Saturn market in style.

Rating: ★★★

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the same path as the one in the original. This provides a reason to play the Saturn version even if you've played it on PC — things aren't exactly what they are on the PC because Sega decided against multiplayer Quake at the beginning of the project. Lobotomy had to make the one-player game a more attractive proposition than it is on PC. Unfortunately, like the original *Quake*, the single-player Saturn version gets stale too quickly, despite a better tuned single-player experience. (The enemy characters are much smarter and actually hunt players down.)

Graphically, the game keeps pace about as well as a mid-range Pentium, with the occasional loss of frames when more than two enemies appear on screen. One major difference is the addition of a light-sourced glare cast on walls by weapon fire, a gorgeous effect only *GL Quake* can better.

But the basic target-and-kill gameplay of *Quake* has been overshadowed by the recent Saturn release of *Duke Nukem 3D*, another masterful conversion that's much better suited for one-player gaming. *Quake* for Saturn is simply a latecoming showpiece for the system's power.

Rating: ★★★

Sega Touring Car

Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **AM Annex**

Sega Touring Car is one of those very few Sega racers that might have been overlooked at the arcade. It fits snugly between *Daytona* and *Sega Rally*, both in system capabilities as well as in gameplay. It's also a mixture of the two — *Sega Touring Car* takes the intense speed of *Daytona* and blends it with the track-to-track circuits of *Sega Rally*. This nice combination makes the game an

extremely energetic racer with its own distinctive personality.

It's obvious the game was fine-tuned for analog support because playing with the digital control is a lot more sluggish than playing with the analog pad. But in either case, the game plays as well as the other two Saturn arcade racers, having a unique feel that's specific to the pace of the race.

It's unfortunate that with the sheer

The last of the Saturn breed of racing games, Sega Touring Car ends the series on a high note

"SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIENDS"

AEROFIGHTERS™
ASSAULT

You want to be a hero? Dogfight bogies and bosses or go head-to-head in two-player combat in stunning graphic environments to save the earth yet again. There are 10 levels of fast action that demand fast reaction. Join the battle in the only game that matters.
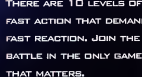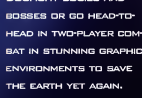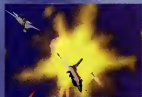
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Saturn

speed of the game, Touring Car's graphic quality isn't as good as the slick Sega Rally port. The game, fast and furious as it is, just doesn't have quite the polish of the previous racer. But like the visually needy and gameplay-perfect Fighter's Megamix, what the game lacks in graphics, it makes up for in options — and does it in spades. Don't like one car? Pick from three others, be it a Mercedes, Alfa Romeo, or Toyota. And if it's not handling to your tastes, you can always tweak the performance.

Touring Car gets all the Sega racing franchise on Saturn very well. It also demonstrates that if you want the best in hard-core arcade racing, Saturn still has what it takes.

Rating: ★★★★

Despite the conspicuously alliterative title, Steep Slope Sliders is a cool blast

Steep Slope Sliders
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Victor Interactive/Cave

Lamentably, the best Saturn games are coming just as the console passes into its lame duck stage. Sega's game selection department has gotten smarter as picking third-party games to publish, but it's a pity that a solid game like Steep Slope Sliders has to emerge into a dwindling market.

Published by Victor Interactive in Japan, SSS is one of the deeper snowboarding games of its genre. Like Snowboarding Trix, it's a Mountain Dew-esque "xtreme" grunge sports game on the surface, but innovative tracks and tricks give it a solid foundation for its attitude. There are seven tracks, with enough multiple paths and shortcuts that it could be labeled the San Francisco Rush of the snowboarding world. The tracks are

very flexible, allowing players to escape the normal "invisible walls" of typical racers. Also like SFR, finishing courses with top scores or stunts is rewarded with bonus tracks and characters.

Graphically, the game compares well to Cool Boarders 2. While it may not have the visual detail or flourishes of its competitor, Steep Slope Sliders nicely avoids the annoying glitching and texture seaming that plague its PlayStation counterpart. Landmarks and obstacles are easy to spot and really don't suffer from any noticeable pop-in problems.

Between this winter's two snowboarding games, Steep Slope Sliders is arguably the better choice. For Saturn owners, it's the best such game available in the U.S.

Rating: ★★★★

Worldwide Soccer 98
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega

Worldwide Soccer II may have ceded the "best soccer game on any console" title to Konami's ISS on N64 (this isn't the forum to restart that debate), but

Sega has made a wise decision to leave well enough alone with the third game in the series. Rather than making sweeping changes in gameplay, the designers have tweaked things a bit and stuffed enough little features into the game to make it a worthy update.

The most obvious changes are the additions of a League Play mode, 40 league teams, and new stadiums. The European league is a welcome addition — sessions can be played in three different countries, a nice touch.

Once in the game, a match is almost indistinguishable from WWS! except in the details. Welcome touches like numbers on jerseys and the addition of a co-announcer contribute an extra fillip of realism without becoming boring. Also, teams are now politically correct — players are represented accurately according to skin and hair color, which should please soccer nitpickers everywhere. The only marked improvement is the goalie AI, which turns out to be much harder to fool this time around.

All in all, Worldwide Soccer 98 is a great sequel and a stronger game than its predecessor.

Rating: ★★★★

Worldwide Soccer 98 continues the series' easy quality — a nice stable place in Saturn gaming

PC

CART Precision Racing
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Microsoft/Terminal Reality

Although the first wave of games from Microsoft was lackluster and disappointing overall, it's clear the developers there are learning fast. While CART Precision Racing won't exactly set the racing world on fire, it's a solid, good-looking effort with enough interesting features to make it worth checking out — and enough promise to make us anxious for the sequel.

Set on the 17 tracks of the official 1997 CART World Series, the game uses GSAT satellite data to model the tracks as accurately as possible. As far as the

CART Precision Racing may be Microsoft's most impressive first effort to date

cars are concerned, there are options for adjusting practically everything, and the disc even includes tutorials and advice from professional race engineer Nigel

Bennet. At the highest level of realism, every car needs to be modelled and tested on each new track if a player is going to have any prayer of winning — the default settings just won't cut it.

Of course, this level of detail is what one would expect from a modern racing sim, but CART has a few other features that make it stand out. The in-car, first-person view, for example, can be set to "look ahead" on curves, so a player isn't always locked into staring down a straight line; it's a handy feature and happens so smoothly and naturally it makes you wonder why nobody has thought of doing it before. Another option can turn the racing "line" of the track into a literal red line on the track for the player to follow (nice for novices

PC

Breaking the Law

Once again, Psygnosis delivers exceptional graphics and the gameplay to back it up

If you've got the horsepower and an AGP motherboard, the graphics are eye-popping

G.Police

Publisher: **Psygnosis**
Developer: **Psygnosis**

We don't know how the developers at Psygnosis manage to keep doing it, but we sure hope they don't get tired and stop any time soon. Combining the latest technology with a tried-and-true gameplay formula, G.Police is simply a smashing good time from beginning to end, with only a few minor annoyances to keep it from being perfect.

Players take the role of a futuristic cop who flies around a Blade Runner-inspired urban landscape looking for the bad guys and blowing them up real good. The vehicle itself is a VTOL type of craft — think of it as a helicopter without the rotors — that can be armed to the teeth with a wide variety of extremely colorful weapons.

On a technical level, G.Police takes advantage of almost every conceivable new thing. It supports force-feedback joysticks, 3D sound, and most importantly, Direct3D hardware acceleration. Further, for those horsepower hogs out there who have invested in an AGP PC and have an AGP-compatible graphics card, the game has an "extreme" level of detail option. Running at this level, the game uses more than 15MB of texture information, including animated signs, and the landscape comes alive in an incredible way. In spite of this, the game can run in resolutions as high as 1024x768 and still keep up a respectable frame rate it is, in short, jaw-droppingly beautiful.

The controls take some getting used to — the craft doesn't fly exactly like a plane or a traditional chopper. But after a little practice, it's as responsive as

one could ask for. Mission goals very, ranging from escorting friendlies to search-and-destroy, but they generally require the player to fly to a location and shoot something. There's some strategy involved, but for the most part, the game is more about reflexes than it is about careful reasoning.

The only problem with G.Police is that it gets extremely difficult after the first few missions, "challenge" is too mild a word. Also, from time to time, it's a little unclear exactly what the player should be doing next to further the mission. Sometimes orders are given verbally, and with everything going on, they can be missed.

More than anything, G.Police is simply fun. The game is also available for PlayStation, and it maintains its solid gameplay on the console. However, for the full eye-popping treatment, the PC version — especially the AGP version — is the one we recommend. It's a truly impressive achievement.
Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

On top of the splendid visuals, the gameplay and control are top-notch as well

The disc also comes with a good selection of racing tutorials and information on all the CART series drivers. Naturally, since this is a Microsoft product, the game supports Direct3D graphics acceleration. It looks very nice indeed, although the draw-in horizon was too close, even on a P2 266. The control is responsive and realistic — which means players can expect to spin out a lot until they get the hang of it (or admit defeat and play on a less realistic setting). The support for Microsoft's force-feedback stick is the best we've seen yet — playing with feedback dramatically enhances the experience.

On the whole, CART Precision Racing does a lot of things right and very little wrong. Some may say it lacks the passion of Papyrus' Indycar series, but we attribute that to a slight lack of polish (we found a number of minor bugs that detracted from the overall feel). Still, it's a very fun game and an impressive first effort. If it improves between versions as much as Close Combat did, expect to see five stars for Cart '99.
Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

Dark Reign

Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Auran**

From the movie-quality introduction to the detailed manual and excellent visuals, Dark Reign is a game that stands out from the rest. Developer Auran has put a lot of effort into this title and it shows — the game is full of little touches that may not make much difference on the surface, but when combined with a solid game engine, really make it shine

Dark Reign is one of the few strategy games that actually makes use of landscape height. For instance, units that are attacking from an elevated position have an advantage while those defending from below are at a disadvantage. Vehicles in the game travel faster on roads than over normal ground. Line of sight is directly affected to, so it's quite possible for an enemy to set up an ambush.

But the attention to detail doesn't stop with the landscape. In past strategy games, unit control has been limited to

The included map editor will have players making custom Dark Reign missions in no time

THE GIANT DEMONSTRATES HIS MOST DEVASTATING NEW WRESTLING MOVE.

basic maneuvers — attack, run, and defend, *Dark Reign* goes beyond this, and each unit can be given specific orders — suicide runs and defensive guard duty, for example. Units can even be sent on harassment missions to unnerve the enemy. With all the available options, strategists should have a field day. There are literally hundreds of different ways to play each mission.

Dark Reign also comes with a detailed map construction kit that's both powerful and easy to use. Experts and novices alike will be making missions in no time.

As a whole, *Dark Reign* is one of the better strategy games to come across our reviews desk in a long time. By combining the best elements of past hits with a slew of new features and a wonderful mission editor, *Dark Reign* is sure to please.

Rating: ★★★★

Fallout

Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Interplay**

Although the Cold War is some years behind us, it is a period of history that's

Despite its somewhat turbulent design history, Fallout still comes out a winner

hard to forget — which is what Interplay is banking on with *Fallout*. Post-apocalyptic worlds are an easy stage for high drama (especially when the intro movies are this good — *Fallout*'s movie is the best we've seen), and it's something of an unhealthy fascination with this generation of twenty-somethings.

Players must rescue the inhabitants of Vault 13 (a Norad-size bomb shelter) from certain death by finding critical components for the maintenance system. The quests evolve from there — dead ends open up new avenues of investigation while storylines separate and come together in a cohesive and natural manner.

Like its spiritual predecessor *Wasteland* (also developed by Interplay), *Fallout* features a beautifully open-ended design. Should players decide to let Vault 13 die, it will happen. If they decide to lead a revolt to the surface, that's also possible. As in the *Ultima* series, a wide variety of character interaction is possible, from simple conversation to going postal and wasting an entire town. To the

programmers' credit, each action has been accounted for in the flow of the game (and if you waste too much time on side quests, loss Vault 13 good bye).

The only hitch to *Fallout*'s system lies in its isometric perspective. Too often, it's hard to find people and items that lie behind walls. More often than not, especially during ranged combat, it's much too difficult to find out if that beast-ie is hiding around the corner or next to the wall. Still, it's a minor gripe in an otherwise strong RPG.

Rating: ★★★★

Myth

Publisher: **Bungie**
Developer: **Bungie**

Since the creation of the realtime strategy game, the genre has pretty much stuck to the resource management/tactical model created by *Command & Conquer*. Unfortunately, that standard has been so successful that most realtime strategy games look fairly similar to each other (to put a mildly). But game companies are striving to break that mold and to move in different directions. Bungie's *Myth* doesn't so

Myth isn't just realtime strategy in 3D, it's a completely different take on the concept

much change the genre as it more injects its conventions in return for tactical accuracy and depth.

Essentially, Bungie has created the realtime tactical operations of the Middle Ages. *Myth* is the perfect medieval combat simulator, modeling the environment of real war so closely it's scary. Projectiles can hit trees and warriors can drown while river dampens fire and trees become pincushions for arrows. Elevation is crucial, and players will quickly learn why being at the bottom of a bunker hill was bad. Very bad.

All this realism makes it harder for the casual gamer, though. The single-player missions are difficult at the start, and by the third mission, the enemy overwhelms the player by more than a three to one ratio — reminiscent of the *Alamo*. With a large and complex control scheme, *Myth*'s learning curve starts higher than anything else on the market. Yet, for the kind of players who paint their own miniatures and build sets, it's a challenge of failed proportions.

Rating: ★★★★

Sabre Ace: Conflict Over Korea

Publisher: **Virgin Interactive**
Developer: **Eagle Interactive**

Given that the predominant trend in flight simulations is to always feature the latest and greatest high-performance jet fighter, *Sabre Ace* offers a refreshing change of pace with its more close-up and personal brand of air combat.

Featuring first generation jet fighters and piston-engined aircraft from the Korean War era, the gameplay in *Sabre Ace* isn't bound to the radar/missile management scenario that so many flight sims are reduced to these days. With only machine guns and cannons as primary armaments, players will have to acquire a fair amount of flying and dogfighting skills to line up a target in the crosshairs over the span of the 45 included missions. When it comes right down to it, seeing an enemy disintegrate before your very eyes offers more of a visceral thrill than having a target marker turn off denoting some distant kill.

In terms of graphics, the standard version of *Sabre Ace* is satisfactory, but it is the 3D-accelerated version of the game that truly shines. The photograpically modeled

Sabre Ace offers a more intimate dogfight than the average modern jet fighter sim

aircraft are spectacular, with the overall environment graphics ranking among the best in the genre. Low altitude ground attack missions will have some problems displaying realistic details like fairly realized terrain and cities, but the inclusion of actual 3D representations for targets makes the blurred terrain an improvement over the likes of those found in Interactive Magic's *iF-22*.

There are only two real complaints that can be leveled at *Sabre Ace*, but they're serious ones, these being the computer AI and the sometimes overly benign nature of the gameplay. The AI works well enough for individual planes, but enemies rarely work effectively together. As for gameplay, long periods of inactivity and little action may ultimately be realistic, but this does little to communicate the intensity of air combat. In fact, it is the vanilla nature of the gameplay that finally reduces *Sabre Ace* to an average experience rather than the superior one that its individual parts would make it seem.

Rating: ★★★

Temujin

Publisher: **SouthPeak Interactive**
Developer: **SouthPeak Interactive**

Temujin is the first game from SouthPeak Interactive to use its new Video Reality engine, which allows the developers to take a real, physical environment, film it, and place it into a game as an interactive environment (think of navigable *QuickTime VR*). The result is, admittedly, visually stunning.

Gameplay, however, isn't quite as nifty as *Temujin*'s visual splendor. That's not to say it's bad: it just isn't anything very new. Players begin in a museum with absolutely nothing to go on. Aside from a brief encounter with a woman who doesn't seem altogether pleased with you, the museum is fairly empty. Therefore, players must wander around and click on the proper hotspots in order to advance the game and watch the next cinema scene.

Throughout the game the puzzles vary in both difficulty and relation to the story. Some seem to come out of nowhere while others are logical extensions of the game's plot. All in all,

Temujin's visuals may be beautiful, but the overall gameplay is par for the course

the puzzles are decent brain food, but they could have been integrated into the story in a much better fashion. A few of them feel as if they're more than slightly out of place.

Movement within the game is surprisingly smooth but does have its caveats. As with any prerendered — or in this case, filmed — game, *Temujin* can't give players full freedom of movement. It's better than watching static video, but you're still tied to a track that must be followed, and this often leads to moments of frustration that involve passing back and forth in front of an object, only to realize that attempting to examine it is an exercise in futility.

Temujin is a fairly solid first step towards the next generation of point-and-click adventure games, and SouthPeak's Video Reality technology allows developers to bring actual locations to games with ease. However, the games themselves still need a good plot and solid interface, and here's where *Temujin* lacks something.

Rating: ★★★

rating

Virtual Pool 2
Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Celeris**

Last year's *Virtual Pool* was a real treat, but this year's *Virtual Pool 2* is a complete stunner. To begin with, the game looks amazing. It boasts realtime raytraced balls, supports hardware acceleration and Pentium II optimization, and can run in resolutions as high as 1024x768 with 16-bit color.

OK, so it's just a game of pool, but on the PC, it doesn't get any better than *Virtual Pool 2*

All well and good, but what makes *Virtual Pool 2* such an incredible game is its dead-on accurate physics model. There might be some shot that can be made in real life that *VP2* can't handle, but if there is, we haven't found it yet. Everything from ball spin to how the cue meets the ball has been factored in — it's even possible to raise the butt of the cue and jump the ball.

The disc also includes a multimedia pool tutor and trick shot instructor.

Players watch others move, then attempt shots at the click of a button. There are also options for displaying the ball's projected path to help in lining up and understanding shots. In fact, interplay offers a rather extraordinary money-back guarantee that *Virtual Pool 2* will improve your real-life game.

This is indeed a simulation of rare quality and deserves all the success it can get.

Rating: ★★★★★

Macintosh

Missed Again
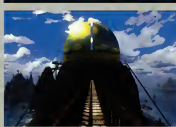
One question: With *Myst* still in the top five, why does there even need to be a sequel?

The graphics for *Riven* are certainly amazing, but maybe not the revolutionary leap that *Myst's* were. Still, they help to create a visually appealing world, and that should be of some comfort as gamers wander around attempting to solve needlessly difficult puzzles

Riven: The Sequel to Myst
Publisher: **Red Orb**
Developer: **Cyan**

More than enough has been written elsewhere about what the success of *Myst* and *Riven* "means." Well, whatever else can be said about them, *Riven* and *Myst* do one thing very, very well: They make themselves very likable to nongamers. Most games today require some knowledge of what *Radical's* Ian Verchere calls "the grammar of videogames." For example, when most readers of **Next Generation** pick up a game, they usually know from years of experience how to play it. However, when plunked down in front of say, *Sonic*, most nongamers would have no idea that the grammar of videogames dictates that a character must jump on the heads of enemies to kill them.

Riven, to its credit, requires no knowledge of the grammar of videogames for more specifically adventure games. Your grandmother could play it and have just as much chance of solving it as anyone else. That's excellent, make no mistake, and a feature that more games need to have if interactive entertainment is ever to be seen by the general public as something beyond an adolescent pastime.

However, that said, *Riven* is only an OK game. The graphics are certainly pretty, but navigation and control take more clicks than necessary. While the puzzles have improved somewhat beyond the random sliders and dials of *Myst*, they still aren't as well-integrated into the story as they are in classic adventure

games like *Lurking Horror* and *Trinity*. For an adventure game to be truly superior, it needs to have puzzles and challenges integrated into the story in a logical and seamless way. Players should never feel like a puzzle has been arbitrarily placed just to stop their movement — puzzles should feel totally organic.

This is where *Riven* largely fails. It isn't as arbitrary as *7th Guest* in terms of puzzle placement, but it also doesn't quite ever reach the cohesion of *Zork*, which had organic, (mostly) logical puzzles, albeit without much story or plot. Also some puzzles seem too tough (the base 5 number system?) for the target audience. On the plus side, *Riven* is as nonlinear as one could hope, so players will never feel stuck.

The success of *Myst* and (presumably) *Riven* doesn't surprise us at all. Games are the best form of entertainment, and when someone presents people who have never played videogames with one that they can actually play, even if it's only a tier game, they're going to like it. A starving man would love McDonald's, but it's not for gourmets, and it's much the same with *Riven*. Your aunt who just bought a Packard-Bell will no doubt be enthralled, but anyone with a mature palate has surely seen it all before

Rating: ★★★

Other Seeking

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34yo WM looks 50'ish, 5'9" 350lbs, seeks fun loving bovine playmate's for outdoor fun in the rain. Must be discreet. Tel-147

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We rarely print them, but thanks to everyone who sends us complimentary letters. We like the hate mail too. It's funny. Write: **Next Generation** Letters, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. We're experimenting with print mail again, but email (sent to: ngonline@imaginemedia.com) is **vastly** preferred.

letters

If you don't write, who will?

I'd just like to respond to the interview with Jeremy Smith in **NG 36**. I thought it was a bit odd that he referred to people who don't watch Sylvester Stallone movies as "computer illiterate."

I've always thought that shoot-'em-up action movies were produced for the lowest common denominator of the public, not the computer-savvy elite. But I suppose I've been corrected once again.

I probably would have bought *Tomb Raider* had it not been for Lara's ridiculous proportions. Jeremy, I wish you'd give us gamers more credit. We don't all watch *Rambo* movies, and we don't all have the mind of a twelve-year-old.

Alan Kasameyer
elank@pressstart.com

Well put

I was quite upset to see that in the interview with Jeremy Smith (**NG 36**), you proved numerous instances of the "F" word, etc. I used to let my kids read **Next Generation** when I

Overpriced? Probably, but if you've got the cash, there's no arguing: The PC does provide the best potential platform for games today

was finished with it, but now I'm not sure I should. I thought you had implemented a "no swearing" policy. What gives?

Tanya Gould
East Lansing, MI

Although we have a policy against using profanity in what we write, we have always and will continue to print problems said by others in quotes. For good or ill, they're their words, and exact quotes give better insight into the person. Plus, the vast majority of our readers are (with few exceptions) certainly mature enough to deal with a few swear words

DEAR NEXT AGGRAVATION.
WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH YOUR MAG? WHY ARE STILL PRETENDING THAT YOU COVER VIDEO GAMES? YOUR REVIEWS ARE THE WORST, YOUR IDEAS ARE ALWAYS STUPID, WHAT KEEPS YOU GUYS GOING? YOU SUCK. HALF OF YOUR REVIEWS LEAVE ME FEELING LIKE YOU DIDN'T ACTUALLY PLAY THE GAME, BUT SOMEHOW GOT A MARIACHI CD INSTEAD AND PUT IT IN UPSIDE DOWN. YOUR SUBJECT MATTER AND CHOICE OF "ADULT" STATUS PUTS YOUR (MEANING EVERYONE IN NEXT GENERATION'S EMPLOY) COMBINED INTELLIGENCE SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN A SEVERELY DEFORMED AND RETARDED YAK AND ATARI'S MARKETING DIVISION. THE YAK BEING THE SMARTER OF THE TWO. YOUR CHOICE TO BE A MAGAZINE THAT CATERS TO A MORE ADULT AUDIENCE IS ADMIRABLE, BUT PERHAPS YOU HAVE MISSED THE POINT. PROFANITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTELLECTUALLY INFERIOR OR THE YOUNGER LESS REFINED, THE WHOLE THING SEEMS LIKE ANOTHER CHANCE FOR YOU MORONS TO EXEROIZE YOUR LACK OF COMMON SENSE AND KNOWLEDGE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE. [additional ranting deleted]

SAMSON7@concentric.net

Thanks for the letter (which we've printed unedited). What keeps us going? Well, as much as we'd like to say that what keeps us going is the opportunity for intelligent discourse with our readers, in your case, that isn't quite true. We would like to know how quoting Jeremy Smith swearing demonstrates poor customer service on our part, but to be honest, we're really not sure we want to hear your answer

I am writing in response to Russell Memrit's letter about *FFVII* and the character Barret. First of all, let me say this — I am not a racist. But I do believe that people are overreacting to this. Come on people, IT'S ONLY A VIDEOGAME! Giving Barret such a personality just gives the game more color and flavor. My friends and I all agree that Barret is one of the more interesting characters in

FFVII, partly due to his personality. Also, just because he speaks in Ebonics (Sorry ... I know people hate that word) does not mean that all African-Americans speak or act in the same way. Once again — it gives the game and its characters more diversity. IT'S ONLY A VIDEOGAME! Treat it as such.

Andrew J. Dubois
110433.1611@compuserve.com

Andrew's letter represents one of the scores of letters we got on this issue. Most contained a similar argument, which really does not address the problem of whether the character of Barret is an offensive stereotype. Instead, it dismisses the possibility of an argument altogether by saying that it doesn't matter if the character is or isn't offensive because it's "just" a videogame. We take serious issue with this. Implying that something isn't important because it's "only" a videogame is not only patronizing to the extreme to game designers and players, but ignores the very real power that all forms of entertainment, videogames included, possess.

You can't have it both ways. Either *Final Fantasy VII* is an astonishing example of the videogame art and should be held to the same scrutiny as other forms of popular art like books, movies, and TV, in which case questions about gross stereotyping are entirely valid, or, as Andrew seems to suggest, videogames are trash and so unimportant and base that any examination of them becomes as pointless as an inflatable dartboard. We take the former view. obviously. Videogames are as much of a popular art form as movies or TV and should be open to the same level of criticism. As to the issue of whether or not Barret's characterization is in fact

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corresponding

offensive, we've printed some readers' views, but in the end, that decision needs to be made by individuals. And now, on to a more pleasant topic: merely bashing us for choosing the PC as the gaming platform of '98 in "Where to play." NG 36

You must be kidding when you say "any PC that has specs lower than our minimum (is) a one-star system." Your minimum system: Pentium 2 Pro, 32MB, 6 4gig, etc. — what CURRENT game requires that type of power today? We are talking today, are we not? I agree that the dream machine Pentium Pro 300 exists, but it is not needed to play most games. I believe a 166 MMX with a 2GB hard drive, good 3D card, and a 17-inch monitor is CLEARLY worthy of at least three stars. What you are using to rate the Saturn at two stars is twice as good as my 200 MMX, 8GB, 32MB, 4MB videocard, Altec Lansing surround sound, 17-inch monitor system. I think 99% of your readers would agree with me ... you are clueless.

Tetz@bytehead.com

PS. I have cancelled my subscription.

I don't know where a machine that costs ten to 20 times more and has to be either upgraded or replaced every one to two years so that it can be useful as a "game machine" could possibly be called "game machine of the year."

Jruben@hotmail.com

Ever since the market crashed in the early 1980s, gamers have been told that computers will replace home systems. Back then, the major videogame magazines all changed their focus to computers — and they promptly went out of business. None predicted that the Nintendo NES would succeed in revitalizing the videogame market in a way that PCs could not. If I had believed the first magazine to suggest that computers would

take the place of console videogame systems, then I would still be playing games on an Atari 800 or Commodore 64.

So forgive me if I disagree with your statement that the "PC is currently the platform of choice for anyone looking for cutting-edge gaming." Some PC games are excellent and multiplayer capability over the Internet is intriguing, to be sure, but the best gaming experience is still being delivered by console systems.

Why? Although price is one issue, there are other reasons why PCs will never replace console systems. First of all, where is the PC located in your home? Most likely in a personal section such as a bedroom or den rather than the family room. Second, how large is the average monitor that people already have or can afford? Mostly likely 15 to 19 inches rather than the 20 to 32 inches of a large television screen. Third, how many controllers do most people have plugged into their PC? Most likely one or two rather than the four to eight offered by consoles. And could you really fit eight people around your monitor anyway?

Despite the advent of CD-ROM and 3D videocards, PCs are not designed first and foremost as

game machines. As long as the price remains high ($2,500 in your least powerful example) and ease of use remains difficult, PCs will continue to be an avenue for mostly solitary game playing. However, they will never become the primary source or "system of choice" for the majority of videogame players.

Mark Androvich
Mandrovic@mail2.quiknet.com

I read your article on the PC as "the game machine of the year" in issue number 36. Perhaps the most interesting part was the little sidebar at the beginning, which outlined the various options that newcomers have to buy into for the PC market. All I can say is, "Wow! Sixty-two hundred dollars for a 'game machine'?" My first car will cost nary a third of the cost of a top-of-the-line computer, and that's sad.

Jason Weil
jweil@northeast.net

All these responses raise good points. PCs are far more expensive than consoles, for less easy to use, and the games are not necessarily better. In fact, there are many console-exclusive games (*Mario, Wave Race*, the list goes on) that

are better than the best PC games in their genre. But despite all that, the PC, if you can afford the time and money it takes to actually play PC games, offers the best potential platform for game playing, and for us to say anything else would be dishonest.

I have noticed that every picture of the upcoming *Zelda 64* shows Link holding his sword ... in his LEFT HAND! It's not that I'm against lefties or anything, but I've owned every *Zelda* game, and Link has never been LEFT-HANDED! I've heard of rearranging storyline and maybe changing the characters a little for new games ... but for God sake, let the boy use the hand he always has.

J McCane
JonBoy311@aol.com

Link has always held his sword in his left hand — look at any piece of Link art from Nintendo. Whether this makes him left-handed is another issue — he may simply employ a Picish/Gaelic shield fighting technique, a defensive fighting style in which the shield is held in the dominant hand. Umm ... maybe we should just drop this topic before we get any further

Good old Link has always been left-handed, at least in pictures and rendered art

Be yourself. Heck, be someone else.

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